THE IDENTITY PROBLEM IN BUDDHIST ETHICS

An Examination of Buddhist and Parfitian Conceptions of the Subject

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ABSTRACT

The Buddhist tradition offers a reductionist view of the subject – the ‘weak’ view -which appears to undercut concern for the consequences of action. The doctrine of morally conditioned rebirth – that is, the perpetuation of a persistent individual through death - entails a ‘strong’ view. Each view has a bearing on morality, and each is problematic: the two seem incompatible. The notion of rebirth and the associated doctrine of *karman* are deeply connected with this. It is in this complex that I find what I call ‘the identity problem’.

I give a general account of Buddhist ethics, placing it within the tradition of ‘virtue ethics’. I show the impact of the identity problem to be large but not total. I deal also with some related topics in Buddhist doctrine: *anātman*, the heterodox ‘Person school’ and the ‘two-truths’ notion.

I consider the bearing of Parfit’s arguments for his version of reductionism on the problem’s solution. Their support for the ‘weak’ view is real but limited. When Parfit deals with the consequences of reductionism for morality, his conclusion is uncertain. When I consider these arguments on their merits, I find them largely unpersuasive. Parfit’s account of reasons for action, with some qualifications, is acceptable, and welcome in its vindication of disinterestedness.

I consider how it stands with Buddhist ethics in this light and offer restatements of the doctrines of *karman* and rebirth. In the case of *karman*, I develop the idea of a guiding metaphor and suggest how it may be applied; in that of rebirth I draw on a broader Buddhist tradition of meditation practice and benvolence. This restatement leaves the ‘strong’ view more sustainable, and its compatibility with the ‘weak’ view less problematic for morality. I then present the Buddhist ethical scheme as largely intact, if with slightly diminished coercive force.

CONTENTS

PREFACE

The Buddha's teaching and its practice make up a field of inquiry extending over two and a half thousand years and many cultures. Many languages have been employed in the record of the teaching and in its study and consideration. The scope of the present work is severely limited but still extensive. The sources on which I have drawn, and from which I quote, are in Sanskrit, Pali and versions of Prakrit. In making points of general application, I have normally quoted the applicable Sanskrit terms by themselves, but have sometimes used the Sanskrit and Pali together: for instance, *Dharma/Dhamma*. I have used English acclimatisations where they are uncontentious, presenting them, and also names, without diacritical marks. Some difficult terms have come to be acclimatised too easily, so that difficulties in their understanding have not been addressed. I therefore use – for instance - *karman* (Sanskrit), sometimes *karman/kamman* (Sanskrit and Pali), and only rarely 'karma' (English). I have however sometimes needed to use such derivations from this last as 'karmic'.

Sanskrit nouns are referred to, in isolation, in their stem-forms: for instance, *dharma* and *karman*. In line with convention, Pali nouns are often (not always) given the nominative singular form: for instance, *kamma*, rather than *kamman, attā*, rather than *attan*. I have followed the practice which seemed most likely to make for clarity on each occasion. Plural forms will not always be recognised for what they are. For instance, the nominative plural of Sanskrit *dhātu*, a word of complex meaning, is *dhātavaḥ*. When I have used a plural form that is not obviously such, I have tried to make this clear.

Quotations from Sanskrit and Pali texts, and from one or two in Greek, are presented in Roman script. Translations are sometimes my own, but I have often taken over the renderings of other translations available in print. Details of these are given in the Bibliography. Capital-lettered names in the footnotes should prompt a reference to the Bibliography. I have reserved italics for quotations from languages other than English and for all titles of works. For emphasis I use underlining.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

1. The identity problem in outline

My immediate concern in what follows will be with a complex of difficulties in the metaphysics of personal identity. My deeper concern is with the bearing of these difficulties on morality. On the Buddhist conception of morality, this is notably problematic, and it is here that I find what I will call 'the identity problem'.

I start with the problem in metaphysics. The notion of the person which I will call the 'weak' notion is conspicuous in the record of the Buddha's teaching.[1] It is expressed by way of analysing the human subject in terms of process, so prompting the image of a 'stream'. The constituents and activities of the subject are found to be unstable and transient, and to give no basis for the postulate of a permanent entity. Such a postulate is taken to be neither needed nor demonstrable. The 'weak' notion should not be unfamiliar, as the line of thought behind it is paralleled in the Western tradition, notably in the work of Hume. In the case of all such notions, there will be a tension between what is asserted and the common assurance of personal identity and continuity. That is to say that 'reductionist' notions, as they are commonly styled, are counter-intuitive. The first manifestation of the problem is therefore the bare credibility of the'weak' notion. This notion is, at first glance, close - and I will later show that it is indeed close - to the version of reductionism presented by Derek Parfit in *Reasons and Persons*. I will consider how far the arguments of *Reasons and Persons* may be applied to the resolution of the difficulties attaching to the 'weak' notion, and also how far those arguments are compelling.

We find in the record, also, another way of viewing the person, which I will call the 'strong' notion'. This is to be found in the way the numerous individuals who people the

[1] 1 I am using the terms 'person' and 'human subject' without discrimination. In Chapter Three I will differentiate them and other terms with the same broad reference.

early record are presented as discrete and persistent. The ‘strength’ of the notion is to be registered in this matter-of-fact presumption. It is strengthened further by the concurrent emphasis given to *karman/kamman*. This is the supposition that the fruits of action will inevitably be bourn by the agent. If I do wrong or act unskilfully in some respect, it is I who will pay for it, and no other, and pay for it to the proper degree. Right or skilful action is accorded a correspondingly happy consequence. There is a yet further strengthening in the presumption of rebirth to be found everywhere in the Buddhist record. A text in the Pali *Aṅguttara Nikāya* records the appearance before Yama, ‘the Lord of Death’, of someone just deceased. He is addressed as a persistent entity: ‘you have done the bad *kammam*; you [emphatic] will experience its *vipākam* (consequence, ‘fruit’)’.[2]

The identity problem is one of the co-existence of two notions of the subject, each one of which has points of difficulty of its own. My concern in what follows will be with the problem’s implications for morality. Concern for the future is amply secured by the ‘strong’ notion. The ‘weak’ notion seems to subvert it. Doubts over personal continuity will raise questions over the responsibility going with agency and over the grounding for prudential calculation. Two verses in the Pali *Dhammapāda*, which I will treat as representative in what follows, tell the same story as that of the judgment of Yama. A man having adultery in mind is warned that he would not greatly enjoy it: fear and furtiveness would be its concomitants, he would risk punishment through the law, and he would face a ‘bad’ and, no doubt, painful rebirth. [3] The last consequence certainly, and perhaps all four, will be the outcome of *karman*. The last is the most daunting, as even the rich and powerful cannot avoid it. The force of the warning owes everything to the presumption that the one who acts is the one who suffers. The ‘weak’ notion seems, at least, to impair this presumption, even in respect of a single lifespan. The ‘strong’ notion secures it, but at the price of bringing into sharp relief some daunting claims. What are we to make of the supposition of conditioning by *karman* and of the presumption that we have existed before and will be reborn again?

[2] AN III, 36 [140]. I have translated a snatch of the words of Yama: *atha kho tayā vetaṃ pāpaṃ kammaṃ kataṃ, tvaññevetassa vipākaṃ paṭisaṃvedissāsī’ ti.*

[3] DhP 309/10. In Pali, *Apuññalābho ca gatī ca pāpikā*. Literally ‘(There is) both acquisition of demerit and a bad destiny/destination’. This verse can be found in other recensions.

2. Is there really a problem?

For this account of the problem I have drawn on the earliest stratum of the Buddhist record, which I will call 'the early texts'. The composition of these texts was followed by a period of systematisation and commentary and then by one of summation. In this last phase, we find works of comprehensive exposition. In the later stages of this process, of which I will say more shortly, the identity problem was not left unaddressed. It was solved - or dissolved - or evaded - by way of taking the 'weak' and 'strong' notions to be telling the same truth in different ways. In effect, its solution was by way of understanding the 'strong' notion in terms of the 'weak'. On this view, which is not without support in the early texts, the 'strong' notion was an inescapable simplification, acceptable in ordinary speech or when talking to 'ordinary people'. [4] The 'weak' notion by itself was the one truly Buddhist view, at least for practitioners. Its expression through the image of a 'stream' – one of the subject as process, not substance – made it easy to claim that karmic retribution was registered 'downstream', perhaps in a life later than that of the related action. [5] Appreciation of this prospect – or risk – would bear on motivation.

This answer – or reformulation – has been taken to be broadly conclusive by a main strand in current scholarship. The line between exposition and endorsement may be fine, and in several recent works we find exposition of the commentators' treatment which amounts, more or less, to its endorsement. Here, I have in mind, in particular, well-received publications by Pye, Harvey and Gowans. These present a scholarly orthodoxy or, at least, a strong strain within it. [6] Its expression varies between them, but the common purport is that we must distinguish a 'substance' view of the subject (my 'strong notion') and a 'process' view (my 'weak notion'). [7] The latter is taken to be a reductionist reordering of the former, which should replace it in the practitioner's understanding.

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[4] Here I translate *pṛthagjana/putthujana*, the common term for those outside the Buddha's circle.

[5] In the terms of art employed by the commentators and, to a fair degree, within the early texts, the subject is a stream (Pali *santāna,* Sanskrit *saṃtāna*), made up entirely of the flow of elements within five 'heaps' or aggregates (*skandhāḥ*) and determined, at least in part, by *karman*. I deal with this in Chapter Three.

[6] PYE (2) p.48/49, HARVEY (1) p.64 ff, and GOWANS, p.71 ff.

[7] Gowans'terminology. See GOWANS p.69ff.

As a summary of what the later Buddhist view amounts to, what we find in these writers may be unexceptionable. It is its barely critical adoption that I take to be dubious. An obvious objection to it is stated by Paul Edwards, writing in response to a review by Keith Ward:

> Reincarnationists are committed to some form of extreme dualism: a person’s body is different in every incarnation, but he is the same since the same mind animates all types of different bodies …… Ward evidently believes that the Buddhist rejection of a substance self … and its (sic) endorsement of the Humean view that the mind is a ‘bundle’ or series of mental states, avoid extreme dualism. This is not so. We do not have survival of the original person unless the mind associated with the later body is identical with the earlier one regardless of whether it is a substance or a bundle. (Edwards’ emphasis) [8]

The Buddhist commentators, we will see, might have granted that what we have may not be ‘survival of the original person’. What ‘the original person’ amounts to is not straightforward. To that extent, Edwards misdirects his fire. Nonetheless, his conclusion is highly relevant to the prime consideration of concern for the future. An element in such concern will be the fear of retribution. What is needed here, to put the point simply, is a candid answer to the riposte easily imaginable from the *Dhammapāda’*s prospective adulterer: ‘why should I care, if I don’t have a bad rebirth?’ What we find – I maintain – is a tendency to evade the challenge, and the proffer of too easy solutions. Gowans offers an instance:

> .. all we need is causal continuity and similarity, not identity. As long as my process-self now stands in the right causal relationships to my

[8] EDWARDS

> process-self in the past, it is reasonable to hold my current process-self accountable for the actions of my past process-self. [9]

This is much too easy. It would seem even less persuasive if we suppose - not a looking-back - but a looking-ahead to a later stage in a succession of process-selves. Why should I – now – care for him or her, or fear now what he or she may suffer? Why should he or she be any more to me than any other stranger, yet unborn?

There is another objection to the 'weak'notion, which I mention now only in order to put down a marker. It is of a kind which seems to attach to all reductionist theories, and which finds its classic statement in Butler's criticism of Locke's presentation of 'the person' in terms of consciousness or memory-chains.[10] Butler found Locke to be presuming the identity of which he took himself to be marking out the grounds. I will come back to this in Chapters Five and Six. What Locke is doing seems to be paralleled by the 'weak' notion', and it may be that this too is open to the same criticism. The words just quoted from Gowans bring up the point: what is the reference of the 'my' employed three times? How is one flow of elements marked off from another?

In pointing out these objections, I am not assuming that they are conclusive; I am claiming only that they need answering, and suggesting that what may be the dominant strand in current scholarship ignores or dismisses them too easily. The case for the present work should therefore be evident. My object is to consider if a better answer may be found to a problem that cannot be so easily brushed aside. In my concluding chapter, after considering what help may be found in Parfit, I will venture such a solution.

The importance of any problem bearing on <u>identity</u> should be apparent. Responsibility is a vacuous notion if it does not extend over time – that is, if it does not attach to beings enjoying such continuity. Momentary responsibility amounts to little more than none. Other problems may seem more pressing to anyone concerned with Buddhist ethics. I am not playing down the importance of such questions as the morality of

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[9] GOWANS p.107.

[10] I deal with this, in opening my discussion of Parfit, in Chapter Five.

engagement in war - for instance – in taking what I call the identity problem to be fundamental. If it does not be seem to be so, that will be because the continuity of the agent – and his or her responsibility – are being taken for granted. The obduracy of the identity problem or – more likely - its evasion is likely to compromise proffered solutions to such other subjects of debate.[11]

3. The Plan Of This Work

In this opening chapter, I set out, and briefly defend, the method on which I will proceed. For this purpose, I mark out the field with which I will be concerned, which is very largely that of the Pali transmission, both the Nikayas and the later commentarial systematisation. I also offer certain definitions, and state and aim to justify some inescapable presumptions. My main object in this is to close off diversions from what is most to the point in the argument that follows. In Chapter Two, I give a brief account of the Buddhist ethical scheme. This is so pitched as to bring out the bearing on morality of the metaphysical problem over identity. In so doing, I mark out the place of *karman* and rebirth. I also point out strands in Buddhist ethics untouched by the problem. I suggest that the scheme is best seen as an expression of 'virtue ethics', and that arguments in support of that broader tradition are applicable to it. In Chapter Three, I offer certain clarifications. One such is of the notion of *anātman/anattā*, and I give grounds for taking the identity problem not to be located there. I also give a brief account of the assertions of a heterodox Buddhist school, the *Pudgalavāda*, or 'Person school', and of the so-called two-truths doctrine, suggesting that both take their shape, at least in part, from an apprehension of the identity problem. In Chapter Four, I deal further with the perplexities attendant on the notions of *karman* and rebirth, considering how far each is acceptable on its traditional understanding.

In Chapter Five, I consider how far Parfit's arguments, in *Reasons & Persons*, are applicable to these questions. They fall under three heads. In Part Three, which is my

[11] The argument of this paragraph might have been reinforced by anticipating some of Parfit's judgments in *Reasons and Persons.* I have in mind those in Chapter 15, 'Personal Identity and Morality'. A reading of this chapter, especially of pages 324 to 326, should support my claim that the problem, which I might have called 'central', is fundamental. See PARFIT (3).

prime concern, Parfit is concerned with personal identity, presenting what he calls a 'Reductionist' conception of the person. He remarks, in passing, on the resemblance of the view for which he is arguing to Buddhist doctrine – in effect to the 'weak' notion. I consider how far this seeming resemblance is a true one, and how far Parfit's arguments might be open to expropriation. In Parts One and Two, Parfit has been concerned with reasons for action, in particular with the grounds for disinterested action incompatible with self-interest. He finds the reasons for action associated with religious profession, in which he includes Buddhist profession, to be essentially self-interested. I resist this conclusion, finding that much of Parfit's argument may be applied to the support of a disinterested view of morality of Buddhist character. Though I deal only briefly with Part Four, it is not unimportant, being largely concerned with the claims of future generations. This becomes relevant to my own conclusion in Chapter Seven.

Chapter Six is concerned with how far Parfit's arguments in Part Three of *Reasons and Persons* are conclusive on their own terms. Here I take some account of Parfit's response to critics, before concluding that the case for his version of reductionism is not made out – that is, it can provide no support to the 'weak' notion. In Chapter Seven, I consider how it stands with the identity problem in the light of this conclusion. My concern is now largely with the 'strong' notion. I consider the problem's 'outer' dimension, made up of the doctrines of *karman* and rebirth and mark out the lines of a fresh understanding of each. I bring out the substantial convergence of this with Parfit's conclusions in Part Two of *Reasons and Persons*, as I have revised them, and its compatibility in point of concern with those of Part Four. I conclude that the identity problem is very largely resolved in this way, though I grant that the threat of a bad rebirth, daunting on the traditional view, loses something of its coercive force.

4. The formation of 'Buddhism'

I follow the usual reference of the term 'Buddhism' to a body of beliefs, a community, and a mode of practice. These find their origin in a historical figure with the clan-name Gotama, who lived and taught around the Ganges valley, perhaps in the period between

480 and 400 BC. [12] The tradition distinguishes him as Sakyamuni Buddha.[13] I will refer simply to ‘the Buddha’.

The tradition which derived from the Buddha is of great antiquity, yet still vigorous, of wide geographical extent and, on the face of it, admitting much variation. It is difficult to consider all this without some organising structure. In what follows I distinguish between the content of four phases:

Phase 1. The time of the Buddha’s teaching. While scholarship has it that this teaching is not extant *verbatim*, it is the hypothetical original from which all else derives.

Phase 2. The period of the earliest record, textual and archaeological, taken to be a rendering of the content, no longer extant, of Phase 1.

Phase 3. The period of development: of the extension, systematisation - perhaps also revision - of the content of Phase 2. This is the period of the developed and distinctive religious system, in which it becomes possible to consider doctrinal claims against a standard of orthodoxy.

Phase 4. The period of aftermath, in which doctrine and practice reflect those of Phase 3 but in which the concern for orthodoxy may be weakened or given up. This is the period of revisionism, perhaps thoroughgoing, of ‘demythologising’, and of openness to unfamiliar influences; it may also be one of reaction to such developments.

The Buddhism of the present-day is one the of the overlapping of Phase 3 and Phase 4 - that is, of continuing orthodoxy, both in countries where Buddhism has been long-established and in the West, and of new developments representing a more or less sharp break with orthodoxy.

A suggestive parallel with Christianity needs little spelling out. In each case, there is shown to be a charismatic originator with a crowd of followers, with an inner and an innermost ring. He writes nothing but teaches, preaches, exhorts and explains copiously.

[12] The dating of the Buddha’s lifespan is a matter of scholarly dispute.
[13] The tradition has it that there have been many Buddhas. Sakyamuni (the wise man of the Sakya tribe) is the most recent.

After much the same development in each case, we have what is unmistakeably a religious system, something on which textbooks could be written and examinations set. Some sharp differences in the formation of the Buddhist and Christian traditions are not, I think, such as to rule out the parallels between the two, and the contrasts, which I will sometimes suggest.[14]

5. What I mean by 'Buddhist ethics': its textual basis

My subject is not Buddhist doctrine as a whole but Buddhist ethics, and I must now define more precisely what I shall take this to be. I take 'ethics' to be that which is concerned with conduct - that is (not exhaustively), with prescription, precepts and counsel concerned with what to do and what not to do; with how to live, what to live for, and what to aim at. A vital strand of Buddhist teaching has this concern. I begin by proposing certain distinctions, which accord with the schema set out above:

The ethics of the Buddha. This is what the Buddha, the originator, had to say on the subject of morality. It belongs to Phase 1 above, and is what would have been caught if the Buddha had been followed round by one or more reporters of vast and perfect memory, and what would have been available if this report had enjoyed a flawless subsequent transmission. The Buddhist tradition has it that at least the first of these conditions was met. Scholarship will wish to be persuaded of that.

Buddhist ethics. This is the product of a long historical process, from the record of the earliest texts to a fully developed religious system. It belongs to Phases 2 and 3 above. My subject - Buddhist ethics – is concerned with the whole of this period, but I will be concerned more especially with the earliest part. In sum, I take 'Buddhist ethics' to be the teaching, exhortation and counsel bearing on ethics that is to be found in the records of a period which I will mark out more precisely below.

[14] The Christian record received written form much more promptly; it was recorded in one language within a literate culture. The earliest extant manuscripts are held to date only two or three hundred years from the composition of the texts. In this last respect, especially, the contrast with the Buddhist record is sharp.

Buddhistic ethics. This belongs to Phase 4 above. I use the term to denote a system or line of reflection on ethics which is of Buddhist provenance or inspiration - that is, one that is rooted in Buddhist ethics as defined above but offered without concern for orthodoxy, being ready to modify or discard features of Buddhist ethics that it is unwilling to defend.

The textual basis of 'Buddhist ethics', as I have defined it, is vast and varied. In the next three chapters, I will draw largely on the *Tipiṭaka*, the Buddhist canon in Pali, in particular on the Sutta – that is, the sutta-texts making up the five Nikayas, in the first four of which we have the narrative and dialogue form of the Buddha's teaching. I sometimes refer briefly to the Vinaya, the disciplinary code for monks. The Pali is the one recension of the canon still fully extant in the original, and no general treatment of a Buddhist topic can avoid substantial reliance on it. I refer in passing also to the equivalent to the Pali record in other Indian vernaculars - that is, to fragmentary survivals in the original languages and, in discussing the Pudgalavada, I make use of some translations from Sanskrit or Prakrit into Chinese. [15] I touch also on the Prakrit inscriptions on rocks and pillars, cut on the order of Asoka in the latter half of the Third Century BC, and refer occasionally to a narrative work in Buddhist Sanskrit, the *Mahāvastu,* which preserves some early material. I refer also to the *Kathāvatthu,* a component of the Pali Abhidhamma, a scholastic reordering of the doctrine to be found in the Vinaya and the Nikayas, and to some later works of systematisation and commentary. These are the *Milindapañha,* and the *Visuddhimagga* of Buddhaghosa, both in Pali, and the Sanskrit *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* of Vasubandhu. These are the works of summation I referred to in opening. I enforce a point I make in concluding by quoting from the much later *Bodhicaryāvatāra.* Where they seemed to provide the best illustration, I have referred to works of fiction, written on Buddhist assumptions: the *Divyāvadāna* and a celebrated Chinese novel.

The field of inquiry which I have marked out is very large and its components are heterogeneous. It extends over seven or eight hundred years, and some of my references

[15] Fragments of the early record are still in course of recovery. For an account of the recovery and continuing decipherment of material which enlarges our knowledge of the Buddhism of Gandhara, in North East India, see GLASS.

fall outside this period. It may be thought that my concerns, or some of them, would have been more effectively addressed if it had been narrowed. This might have been done by considering either the early texts – broadly, the Nikayas – or the later development by way of commentary and synthesis. To have considered only one of these would, however, have had the consequence of ruling out of consideration the question of what the development of the latter from the former amounted to – that is, how far the formulations of the later period are a restatement in other terms of what is to be found in the Nikayas, and how far the expression of something distinct.

Some remarks by Bertrand Russell, in discussing St Augustine, throw light on a closely comparable case:

> .. the writings of St Paul, particularly the Epistle to the Romans. These are treated by Augustine as a lawyer treats the law: the interpretation is able, and the texts are made to yield their utmost meaning. One is persuaded, at the end, not that St Paul believed what Augustine deduces, but that, taking certain texts in isolation, they do imply just what he says they do. [16]

Is the commentarial presentation of the doctrine of the early Buddhist texts best seen in this way? Do the commentators construct something essentially new, if only by way of straining the meaning of proof-texts drawn from the early sources? My view of particular cases of this process should emerge from what follows in later chapters. I have already suggested that the co-existence of the 'weak' and 'strong' notions of the subject was appreciated early and registered as problematic. Some of the formulations of commentarial Buddhist orthodoxy, and of departures from orthodoxy, are best seen as having been shaped by that recognition. I anticipate what is to come by saying that I take the account, or accounts, of the rebirth-claim which we find in the later sources, for instance in the *Visuddhimagga*, to be less an explanation than a fresh account, so expressed as to be secure against obvious objections. Whether or not I am right in these conclusions, discussion of the problem needs to be broad enough to permit them to be offered. The course I have followed is not uncommon. Two of the works of scholarship

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[16] RUSSELL p.362.

to which I have referred have their basis in the Pali Nikayas, but range further as the needs of the argument seem to dictate. [17]

Much the same question is raised by the extension of my range of reference outside the Pali transmission. Several of the writers to whom I shall refer below have eschewed this.[18] My own handling of sources is not, in fact, greatly different from theirs: if it is not quite confined to the Pali, it is that which is preponderant in the argument. In referring to texts in other transmissions, I have been guided by a sense of what was apposite and of what provided a telling demonstration. None of these other sources is problematic except the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*. This well-known and influential work presents a form of Abhidharma other than the Pali Abhidhamma. Substantial reliance on it here would require a proper account of its provenance and theoretical background.[19] I deal only with its concluding part, where Vasubhandu makes useful distinctions with exceptional clarity. As this is decidedly helpful, I judge that strict confinement to the Pali would have been an impoverishment. It must, however, be granted that all quotation from the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* is at risk of being misleading, if only on account of the terseness of the Sanskrit in which the work is written. The text has to be expanded in translation, as it would otherwise hardly be readable. Translators will

[17] Harvey refers to the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya.* Gowans confines himself to the Pali, but refers to Buddhaghosa.
[18] For instance, PEREZ-REMON and SIDERITS.
[19] For a useful – very brief - summary of this, see COUSINS (2).

expand in a variety of ways, some of which may be tendentious. [20] I try to be alert to this risk in the quotation and summaries I offer.

6. How to understand the early texts

How far do the early texts, the Pali Nikayas and their parallels, catch the words of the Buddha *verbatim*? How far do they convey his teaching? These obvious questions may be taken together. Here, I concur with the scholarly consensus that the process of transmission from the time of the Buddha went beyond bare preservation. It is hardly disputable that the text of the first four Nikayas, in particular, represents a scholastic reordering. It bears the marks of having been so arranged, by subject and otherwise, as to make it memorisable and apt for oral transmission. This seems to have been achieved by its parcelling out and consignment to specialists.[21] All this makes it plausible to ascribe all the essentials of the teaching of the Nikayas to the Buddha, but not to claim verbal inerrancy for its expression.

A related question is that of coherence. This bears on the doctrine which we find in the early texts, their internal consistency or shortfalls from it. Here, the natural presumption

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[20] This can be illustrated by comparing each of two recent translations with the Sanskrit original and with the other. For these, see Bibliography. I take a passage where Vasubandhu brings out the distinctions with which I will be concerned, and to which I return:

Pradhan (p.1) *Yat tarhi vatsīputrīyaḥ pudgalaṃ santam icchanti|vicāraṃ tāvad etat|kim te dravyata iccantyāhosvit prajñaptitaḥ|kim cedaṃ dravyata iti kim vā prajñaptitaḥ|rūpādivat bhāvāntaraṃ cet dravataḥ| kṣirādivat samudāyaścet||*

Pruden (Vol IV, p.1314) 'The Vātsīputrīyas admit a *pudgala* which is neither identical to the *skandhas* nor different from them. We should examine whether this *pudgala* exists as an entity or as designation of a nominal existence. If it has separate existence, like physical matter, then the *pudgala* exists as an entity. If it is only a collection, like milk, then it exists as a designation'.

Duerlinger (Sec. 2.1) 'The Pudgalavādins, [who profess to be followers of the Buddha's teachings,] assert that a person exists. [To determine whether or not their assertion conforms to the Buddha's teachings,] we must first consider whether in their view a person is substantially real or is real by way of a conception. If a person is a distinct entity like visible form and other such things, he is substantially real; but if [by analysis] he [shown to be] a collection [of substance], like milk and other such things, he is real by way of a conception'. (Duerlinger's expansions, reflecting early commentary, and brackets)

[21] See NORMAN Ch.III, especially p.44ff.

is that the process of reordering would have promoted consistency. This is because its imposition would have made written material more easily memorisable, and because what might appear odd or intrusive in what is received could be expected to drop out or to be written out.[22] This common presumption, which I find entirely plausible, does not extend to denial that there are puzzles in the record as we have it, or that there may be evidence of misunderstandings on the part of those engaged in transmission.[23] In other words, there is a very substantial coherence, which is less than total. Shortfalls from coherence may be original, or they may have resulted from errors of transmission.

Two problematic passages are worth referring to now, as they bring out what is involved. One, a short passage in the *Dīgha Nikāya*, is merely curious.[24] The Buddha is instructing Ananda, his attendant, on the way to deal with women. This passage is to be found in the record of the Buddha's last days, a large part of which has the valedictory smack to be expected. It may have the place it has only because no one knew where it belonged.[25] That cannot be certain, as it seems quite possible that this odd survival is indeed the memory of an exchange. Dying men will not talk only by way of summing up their message. It fits with this consideration that the dialogue might be humorous. The words may have come to us *verbatim*, while the tone has been lost. Perhaps the Buddha's concluding words of counsel, *sati .. upaṭṭhapetabbā*, should be rendered 'look out for yourself!' rather than, as Walshe has it, as 'practise mindfulness'?[26] Nothing is more easily lost than humour, even in transmissions less hazardous that this.

A point of interpretation of much more significance is brought up by the *Bhārasutta*.[27] In its place in the Pali *Saṃyutta Nikāya*, this text is embedded among others of the same concern, which, present the 'weak' notion of the subject with much repetition. The *Bhārasutta* seems to give decided support to the 'strong' notion, at least if we take its

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[22] I have heard Gombrich remark that the Chinese translations of the original versions of the Hinayana canon tend to omit passages which are hard to interpret. If that is so, it is an instance of the same tendency.
[23] Here, and elsewhere, in touching on the formation and transmission of the Buddhist record, I am much in debt to current scholarship, especially to Norman and Gombrich. I should also refer to an article by Mark Allon, which gives a persuasive explanation of the typical literary form of the Pali texts. See ALLON (1).
[24] DN No.16 *Mahāparinibbānasutta* [141].
[25] A suggestion found in Walshe's translation of the Nikaya, *Thus have I heard',* note 430.
[26] The Buddha's tone seems jovial, but the word *sati* (mindfulness) suggests he is serious. Hence the puzzle.
[27] SN III [25]

concern to be with an individual, persistent across lives, referred to as a 'burden-carrier'. It has therefore received much discussion.[28] Should this discordance strengthen our sense of the likelihood of the *Bhārasutta* having come, more or less as it is, from the Buddha's lips? Behind this question lies the problem, yet more basic, of how the words are to be understood. How should we render the word *bhārahāra*? [29] This has been much discussed: is it an agent-noun or an action-noun? Would those who first heard the Buddha utter the word – as the tradition would have it – have been open to that distinction? [30] If that is doubtful, is it wise to press the distinction now?

These two examples bring out something of the difficulty of interpretating the early texts. This difficulty must not be exaggerated, as the Pali Nikayas, taken as a whole, tell the same doctrinal story. It is only on close reading that uncertainties over translation, form, context and tone come to be felt. I believe this is the common experience of those first acquainted with Buddhism in its Pali transmission. What is immediately striking is its coherence. We find a doctrinal system of a kind on which textbooks and other introductory accounts may readily be written. Much of the work required, of simplification and listing-off, was done centuries ago. It is however noticeable that this assurance tends to weaken with closer acquaintance. Over its 40-year span, the work of Richard Gombrich on the Pali transmission seems to show a modest shift on the writer's part towards granting the decided complexity below the surface of the received text.[31] If that is so, the difference in that respect between Gombrich's approach to the texts and that of a scholar such as Masefield is rather less than it appears to be.[32]

It is tempting to say that the distinction drawn above, between 'the ethics of the Buddha' and 'Buddhist ethics', justifies an effective disregard of the uncertainties, real

[28] For instance, in COLLINS (1) p.164/65.
[29] Is it the 'bearer' or the 'bearing' of the burden?
[30] The thoroughly orthodox Theravadin scholar who has translated the whole Nikaya adds this endnote: 'Collins translates *bhārahāra* as 'the bearing of the burden', contending that *hāra* must be understood as an action noun … [Monier Williams], however, lists 'a carrier, a porter' as meanings of *hāra*, and it sems clear that this is the sense required here'. He goes on, however, to offer an interpretation giving no support to the 'strong' notion. See the translation of the *Saṃyutta Nikāya*, by Bhikkhu Bodhi, pp.1050/51.
[31] See GOMBRICH (1) and (2). I also have in mind the Numata lectures which Gombrich delivered in 2006. I take account of these, and of Gombrich's earlier work, in all that follows.
[32] See MASEFIELD, p. xix: ' … the texts are themselves frequently fraught with contradictions'. I take 'frequently' to be much exaggerated.

or fanciful, brought up in discussion of the provenance of the early texts. This was, at first, my own assumption. I now find the complexity of the texts to be such as to make inescapable the question of their origin and formation. I am concerned, however, to maintain 'Buddhist ethics'- on my definition - as the field of attention. Much of the point of that definition was to stiffen resistance to the temptation to go behind the record as we have it, on the presumption, or speculation, that – somehow - the Buddha 'must' have meant something other than what is found there. This hypothetical 'other' is then found to be more acceptable, on whatever standard of acceptability. This whole approach is damaging, as it is likely to issue in evasion. Real difficulties may be set aside, in the construction of a speculative substitute for what we have, in which such difficulties will not be found. I will, therefore, take the texts I have mentioned above as my 'field', dealing as necessary, but only as necessary, with problems in interpretation.

Masefield makes a point in passing, which must have been widely registered. In his preface he quotes from Johansson, with evident endorsement:

> Views about Buddhism have very frequently been based on a very limited range of material, most often a few quotations from the Pali Canon. There are, in fact, a small number of quotations that appear again and again, while hundreds of others always pass unnoticed.[33]

This is a well-founded observation, though I take what Johannson remarks on to be less of a limitation than Masefield supposes. Narrowness of focus in quotation matters little if we recollect the extent of the exposition – a greater quantum by far than 'hundreds of others' - from which a few passages stand out for being helpful in summing up or for supporting a contention. Some of these, such as the *Bhārasutta*, or words or phrases to be found in it, stand out for their apparent departure from the teaching of the unquoted mass. The attention given to these cases seems unsurprising. In what follows, I will aim to give equal attention to the unremarkable contexts in which they are found.

[33] MASEFIELD, p. xv

Masefield's comment points also to the practice of invoking what, in the Christian context, have been called 'proof-texts'.[34] What is the value of the style of argument founded on selective quotation as the means of clinching an argument? It is a style well established in the commentarial texts produced around the end of our period, and the germ of it is to be found at the beginning. An instance is to be found in the Pali *Aṅguttara Nikāya*, where the exposition is concluded by a quotation from the *Sutta-Nipāta*. We see from this reference how far the Buddhist record is scholastic in character, the mode of presentation being a manifestation of that. [35] The drawbacks of such a method hardly need dwelling on.

7. Texts and slabs

In seeing early Buddhism in terms of the textual remains I am following the scholarly consensus that has prevailed in the West since the subject began to be studied. There have however been dissenters from this consensus and I should refer to the work of the most recent, Professor Gregory Schopen.[36] Schopen's case is founded on there being archaeological and epigraphic evidence for early Buddhism, as well as textual evidence. He points out that this is durable, roughly dateable and early, whereas the texts are to be found on manuscripts, almost all of the modern period, containing material of which the age, provenance and evolution have all been controversial. If the texts and the slabs, as we may call them, told the same story, the difference would matter little, but Schopen claims they do not. The evidence from slabs to which he points suggests that at an early period, perhaps around the time the various recensions of the canon were being written down, Buddhist monks were making offerings of money, typically for the construction of stupas, for the benefit of others, typically relatives. [37] This seems to jar with the Vinaya, or disciplinary, rule prohibiting monks from having money and to jar also with the texts' doctrine of *karman*, with its implication that that the agent and the agent alone

[34] 'The Church to teach, and the Bible to prove'. This old-fashioned Anglican insistence, pitched against 'Rome' on one side and 'Dissent' on the other, catches what is meant by the term 'proof-texts'.

[35] AN III 33 [134]. The Buddha is recorded, not only as referring, but as giving a precise reference: *Idaṃ ca pana metaṃ sāriputta sandāya bhāsitaṃ pārāyaṇe udayapañhe.* Bhikkhu Bodhi translates: 'About this, Sariputta, I have spoken in "The Questions of Udaya" in "The Way to the Far Shore"'. What more might scholarship require?

[36] SCHOPEN.

[37] A 'stupa' is a funeral mound, often elaborately stylised.

enjoys the fruits of action, good or bad. Schopen's point is that, at least across this narrow range, the impression given of the day-to-day reality of Buddhist practice is quite at variance with what the texts would have led us to expect. The implication is that this should lead us to regard the texts with more reserve. [38]

Against this, one might concede that the doctrine of transference of merit is indeed at odds with *karman* doctrine; this did not prevent it slipping into the orthodox mainstream some time after the date of the slabs, whose evidence perhaps does no more than prompt a re-dating of this development. As for the pecuniary offerings, might they not have been offered by the families and friends of the offering monk, the monk being the obvious agent? But that is to speculate. Schopen may be right in pointing to the arbitrariness of the preference for one kind of evidence - textual evidence - on the part of the consensus, and may even be right in attributing this to an unconscious 'Protestant' preference for scripture, on the polemical principle of *sola Scriptura*, applied out of its context, For the present purpose however this is beside the point, which is that 'Buddhist ethics', as I have defined it, and as I find it to be grounded in the texts, has to be considered for what it is. I take no position on the extent to which the precepts of Buddhist ethics, as I am using the term, governed the conduct of the members, or some of them, of the primitive Sangha. This is to say no more than that Buddhist ethics can be discussed in the way in which we discuss Aristotle's ethics, in disregard of its application within its own period or any other.

8. The method of this work

In what follows, I will use the term 'Buddhist ethics', as I have defined it, without further explanation or defence. What it covers is grounded in texts, highly disparate in character, and to be dated, variously, over a long period. 'Buddhist ethics' – to use quotation-marks for the last time - is a derivation from specified texts, and there is no

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[38] Conclusions close to Schopen's may be pressed in other contexts. If there were space to consider them more fully, I would try to develop the implications of the following remarks, from a contemporary Roman historian: '... the two bodies of data [textual and archaeological] represent different kinds of reality, and have to be ordered and interpreted each according to its own rules. .... Most archaeological 'facts' turn out to be a complex mixture of primary data and secondary interpretation.' See CORNELL, p. 29.

way to get behind this connection. The attempt to do so is likely to be a move into fantasy. It is also unnecessary, as I judge the process of transmission evident from the form of the early texts within the Pali canon to be such as to make it reasonable to treat them as 'authentic', in that they preserve the doctrine – however systematised in transmission – of a single teacher. There may be difficulties in the interpretation of the record, of a kind touched on above, and these must be dealt with *ad hoc,* as they come up. The method I shall follow is, therefore, one of putting my primary focus here. I will draw also on other sources, especially the later commentarial texts, in order – as discussed above – to consider the development and modification of doctrine. I draw quite widely, though infrequently, on other sources, heterogeneous in kind, as the interests of the argument seem to be served thereby.

The Buddhist notion of rebirth will figure largely in what follows. I am concerned essentially with rebirth as a human being. The Buddhist tradition admits rebirth in other forms and on other planes of existence and full treatment of the rebirth-notion would require consideration of these other cases. This could not be given briefly, and I will deal with these cases only as the argument requires. The case of human rebirth is the most interesting case of the five and the most complex, which is why I make it my prime, and almost sole, concern. [39]

It is because I hope my conclusions, if persuasive, will be found applicable across the whole Buddhist field that I quote in Sanskrit when illustrating general points. I do this despite my overwhelming reliance on the Pali, and trust that it will be a reminder of that hope.

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[39] Rebirth in hell – to point a contrast – is a simple matter. There will be no doubt <u>who</u> or <u>what</u> is reborn.

CHAPTER TWO

Buddhist Ethics

9. Introduction

I now offer a general account of Buddhist ethics, which is designed to bring out the scope and bearing of the identity problem. I am also concerned to show the connection of the ethical scheme with other main strands in Buddhist doctrine, and to offer the sketch of a metaethical characterisation. My object is to show what the scheme amounts to, both from 'within', from the standpoint of the practitioner, and from 'without' – that is, from a philosophical viewpoint. The impact of the problem bears on both dimensions of the scheme, and so must any adequate solution.

Buddhist ethics has only recently had much philosophical attention. The Buddhist approach to morality had to be made out in works of broader focus. A hundred years ago, these might have been those of Rhys Davids and R.S.Copleston; in the inter-war period, those of E.J.Thomas; after 1945, those of Christmas Humphreys. These writers are often helpful and instructive, and cannot be said to have ignored the place of morality in the Buddhist scheme of things. This is notably the case with Copleston, who has much to say about the moral deficiencies of his Buddhist contemporaries. What is not found in their work is a systematic presentation of the ethical strand within the whole. [40] It is to the lack of this that we must attribute the disregard of the philosophical dimension. Even an unsuccessful attempt at system would have brought up points of philosophical interest.

The near-disregard of Buddhist ethics no longer obtains. In recent years, there have been systematic accounts in English by established scholars – notably by Damien

[40] In Coplestone's case, the chapter entitled 'The Buddhist Moral System in General' takes up fewer than ten pages. Copleston was Anglican Bishop of Colombo, and made his observations from that vantage point.

Keown and Peter Harvey.[41] Since 1994, there has been a specialised journal.[42] There have also been some illuminating accounts of the living religion.[43] These are from a broadly anthropological perspective, and cast light on the ethical strand within the tradition in the course of dealing with contemporary practice.

My debt to all these writers and to others will be evident in what follows. If my subject were Buddhist ethics *per se*, or contemporary understandings of it, I would need to state the debt more precisely and to mark out my own position. As it is, my account has the narrower purpose just stated. I am concerned only to show that the identity problem is of prime importance, yet less than total in its impact, and to bring out its philosophical character. The account which follows is therefore threefold. I deal, only briefly, first with the revaluation of elements in the brahmanical religion of his day, and second with the worship of the Buddha. These two strands are, I suggest, complementary. I then consider a third strand, which is made up of practice, both by way of subscription to precepts and by way of meditative and moral cultivation (*bhāvanā*). This last strand will be my main concern, as it is here that the identity problem is central, and it will be the basis for the philosophical characterisation with which I conclude.

This is not the only way in which Buddhist ethics could be presented, and other argumentative purposes would have been better served in other ways. Not everything of religious or philosophical interest will be brought out: I will have little to say about Nirvana/Nibbana and nothing about *pratītya samutpāda/paticca samuppāda* (conditioned arising, dependent origination). Both are of prime importance within the Buddhist scheme of things, and an adequate treatment of *pratītya samutpāda* would have been a useful support to the discussion of *anātman* in Chapter Three. This adequacy would not however have been easy to achieve. From the Buddha's own time, the difficulty of the notion has been manifest, and I simplify what follows in not dealing with it.

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[41] For details of all these writers, see Bibliography. I should also mention a short work by the Sri Lankan, David Kalupahana. For a summary of recent and current scholarship, see KEOWN, Ch 1.
[42] *Journal of Buddhist Ethics*.
[43] See GOMBRICH(1), KING, SPIRO and TAMBIAH. I have more to say about these writers below.

10. Revaluation

Much of the Buddha's teaching is expressed in terms of reaction to the brahmanical orthodoxy of his time. This may be by way of plain repudiation or of appraisal with distaste. [44] Another form of reaction is the bare appropriation of a form of traditional practice. Yet another is what I call 'revaluation', by which I mean the appropriation of a belief or practice or attribution of excellence, and its employment in another way, or in another context. This fresh employment will be distinct from the original, yet not so distinct as to break all continuity. What is revalued remains recognisable in point of origin. I am concerned here with this last.

Out of many instances the *Sigalakasutta* , in the Pali *Dīgha Nikāya*, may stand as a case of revaluation. [45] This records an encounter between the Buddha and a young man found engaged in the ritual of brahmanical orthodoxy. Early in the morning, the Buddha has gone out to receive alms. He sees Sigala paying homage to the different directions and asks him why he is doing this. Sigala explains:

> 'Lord, my father, when he was dying, told me "Son, you ought to worship in that way". And so, Lord, out of respect for my father's words, which I give weight to, esteem and worship … [46]

The Buddha responds:

> 'But, householder's son, that is not the right way to pay homage to the six directions according to the discipline of the Noble One …..' [47]

He proceeds to revalue (as I have called it) the ritual actions:

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[44] In the Pali *Aṅguttara Nikāya*, the Buddha associates *brāhmānaṃ mantā* (the hymns of the Brahmins) with womanising and 'wrong view'. What the three have in common, it seems, is that they are done not openly but furtively. See AN I, 129 [283].

[45] DN No.31

[46] *Pitā maṃ bhante kālaṃ karonto evam avaca: 'disa tāta nāmasseyyāsīti'. So kho bhante pitavacanaṃ sakkaronto garukaronto mānento pūjento*

[47] *'Na kho gahepatiputta ariyassa vinaye evaṃ chadissā namassitabbā ti'*

> … the four defilements of action are given up; he does not do evil from the four causes, he does not follow the six ways of wasting one's substance – it is through avoiding these fourteen evil ways that he covers the six directions … [48]

He enlarges on this at length, specifying the right actions that this avoidance amounts to, revaluing rather than prescribing afresh. Sigala receives no rebuke for the store he sets by his father's precept. [49] Traditional practice is to be transformed, rather than given up. The newly inculcated pattern of action fills the place of what it supersedes, and so remain a component of filial piety. In this sense, Sigala's future course of life continues to be, as it needs to be, what his father has commanded.

What the Buddha is shown as doing here finds parallels throughout the record, notably in the field of sacrifice and priestly function. By the time of the Buddha, the significance of sacrifice had come to exceed that of the gods who were its formal recipients. By way of revaluation, there followed a further development. Payasi, just brought to acceptance of the Buddha's teaching by Kassapa, a leading disciple, proposes a sacrifice. He is told that sacrifice going with wrong view is useless. Better is right view (*samyag dṛṣṭi*) along with the avoidance of slaughter and with practical charity. [50] A story in the *Mahāvastu* teaches the abandonment of the idea that salvation comes from 'the fire-sacrifice and offering'. [51] Moral reformation is declared to be better than bathing in a holy river.[52]

What cannot be revalued may be appropriated for a fresh purpose. A plain case of appropriation is the Buddhist designation of Uposatha days, marking the points of the lunar cycle. Here is an adoption of something in popular religion for the purposes of monastic life: the monks come together to review their conformity to the Vinaya. [53] A

[48] *Cataro kammakilesā pahinā honti; catūhi ṭhānehi pāpakammam na karoti, cha ca bhogānam apāyamukhāni na sevati, so evaṃ cudasapāpakāpagato chaddisa paṭicchādī …*

[49] His attitude to his father's precept is itself one of 'worship' (*pūjento*). There is some revaluation even in what the Buddha proceeds to revalue.

[50] DN No. 23.31. 'Right view' is seeing things as they are – that is, as the Buddha sees them.

[51] Vol III [445]. Translation p.446

[52] DN No. 25 & MN No. 7

[53] For an account of the benefits of this observance, see AN VIII 41.

special form of revaluation is found in the demonstrative disregard of something central to brahmanical tradition. A case of this is the admission of a one-time barber to the monastic order immediately before his former masters, so ensuring him precedence over them. [54]

Revaluation is most resonant in the self-presentation of the great king, Asoka. The inscriptions which Asoka ordered to be cut on pillars, and on rocks round his frontiers proclaim his benevolence, not the glory proclaimed of themselves by the Achaemenid rulers of Iran, whose precedent he may have been following. The word found everywhere in these inscriptions is *dhamma*, one of multiple meaning – here, normally, 'morality'. [55] The burden is one of Asoka's dedication to morality, and also of his concern that his subjects should conform to it:

> *Katavya mate hi me sarva loka hitaṃ* (I judge that what I ought to do is promote everyone's welfare).
> *Esa hi sesṭe kamme ya dhaṃmānusāsaṃ* (this is the best work - instruction in morality). [56]

The 'morality' declared is expressed in Asoka's regard for his subjects' wellbeing, his dedication to peace and to the minimisation of violence, and his respect for both orthodox and heterodox religion. How far this fits with historical reality must be a matter for the historian. Here, my concern is with Asoka's conception of himself. His presentation by others, in the later Buddhist record, is rather different. This owes little to the inscriptions, knowledge of which is presumed to have been lost. Its emphasis is on the reformation of the man of violence, who is now devoted to justice and benevolence. [57] All this is emeshed in edifying legend, and likely to be less congenial to the moral

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[54] This is the story of Upali. See the Pali Vinaya, *Cullavagga* VII [182].
[55] A text in the Pali *Aṅguttara Nikāya* differentiates the *dhamma* of the righteous ruler, to whom it is effectively a joint-king, from that of the Buddha. Both are admirable. See AN III.14 [109/10].
[56] Girnar inscriptions 6.9 & 4.10. The language is a form of Prakrit. I follow Hultzsch's transcription. See HULTZSCH.
[57] This is well set out by Strong in his introduction to a translation of the much later *Aśokāvadana*, one of the components of the *Divyāvadāna*. Asoka figures, in passing, in the chronicle history of Ceylon, the *Mahāvaṃsa* (XI 19) where, he is referred to as *Dhammāsoka*. For a general treatment of Asoka, see MOOKERJI.

sensibility of today than the burden of the inscriptions. The recovery of these, in the early 19th century, supplied a revaluation of kingship like no other. [58]

I can refer only in passing to the Buddha's employment of the terms *brāhmaṇa* and *ārya*, both of which are given a distinctive and newly moralised significance. [59] If space permitted, I would enlarge on the way in which, as Gombrich has it, the Pali *Aggaññasutta* is a parody of the brahmanical creation myth. [60] Both these revaluations are to the point, as we sometimes find among Indian commentators the presumption that Buddhism is a variant form of Hinduism. In the West this presumption is almost universally repudiated as misleading. While I would not claim that it is not misleading, it is not entirely mistaken. The Buddha's revaluation of concept and practice was so pitched as to produce what may be called, if anachronistically, Hindus with a difference.

In the *Mahāparinibbānasutta*, the record of the closing month of the Buddha's life, the Vajjians are commended for sticking to custom, and declared to be wise and prudent for doing so. [61] Laypeople are not exhorted to give up traditional practices, though they may be prompted to a reconsideration of them.[62] To say this is to point to a decidedly conservative emphasis. Such an emphasis, evident not only in formal prescription, but also by way of commentary on all aspects of life, is found everywhere in the early texts. It is plainly grounded in a concern for social harmony. Procedure by way of revaluation is by way of transformation through slow influence or permeation. This, on the evidence, was the Buddha's procedure.

11. The worship of the Buddha

[58] Comparable instances are the Emperor Marcus Aurelius and King Louis IX of France, but these are presented as expressions of an ideal - Stoic sage and Christian hero - rather than as revaluations.
[59] For the revaluation of *brāhmaṇa,* see the *Dhammapāda.* See CHOONG, MUN-KEAT for the Buddha's appropriation of this term in the Chinese, originally Sanskrit, record. The Buddha regularly refers to himself as *ārya.*
[60] DN No.27. Discussed in GOMBRICH (2). Such passages as this prompt the thought that what I have called 'revaluation' might as pointedly have been called 'anti-religion'.
[61] DN No.16
[62] DN No.25

The worship of the Buddha is central to Buddhist practice and so to Buddhist morality. Every strand in the early record shows this, the *Mahāvastu* more richly than the Pali canon. What this amounted to is like nothing else.

Faith in the Buddha was commonly the beginning of conversion and of following the path. [63] This was not faith in a god. The Buddha is not, as the gods are, within the sphere of *saṃsāra* (the phenomenal world) and he is not liable to rebirth. As a god is a poor thing beside a Buddha, there is little to this disclaimer. His humanity is a more complex matter. He is shown as being treated as normally human by nearly all those with whom he comes to deal, though also with the greatest reverence by his followers. The gap in time between his lifetime and the written record is such that day-to-day detail is largely lost. A little, indeed, comes through to us: the Buddha prefers agreeable surroundings in which to eat from his bowl, and he sometimes suffers backache.[64] He makes an *exemplum* of his dying, plainly human, body, declaring that all compounded things are subject to dissolution.[65] Here are plain touches of humanity. In a celebrated passage, it is declared what the Buddha is not: there are four such assertions from his own lips; one is that he is not a human being. [66] Strictly, the denial is that he will <u>become</u> a human being or a being of any other kind in a future life, a denial that is founded on the claim that he is enlightened and no longer subject to rebirth. The text seems, however, to admit the reading that the Buddha is talking of what he is at the time. Insofar as the Buddha is in any sense not a human being, it is in the sense that he enjoyed the peculiar karmic history of a *bodhisattva* (Buddha-to-be) until his enlightenment, and that his final birth was the issue of this process, without sexual intercourse. The simplest conclusion seems to be that the Buddha is a human being but no common one.

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[63] MN No. 12 & 47.
[64] DN No. 33
[65] DN No. 16
[66] Two versions of the passage are extant, one in the Pali recension, one in the Gandhari. See AN IV 36, and the reconstructed Gandhari in ALLON (2) p.124. For the background to the Gandhari, see GLASS. The future tense is employed in both recensions both for the interlocutor's questions and the Buddha's replies. In the Pali recension, before the dialogue opens, the interlocutor has noticed the marks of the feet left on the ground by the Buddha. This prompts him to reflect: *na vat' imāni manussabhutassa padāni bhavissanti* (these will not be the feet/footprints of a human being). The future tense is used here too - surely with the significance of the present? A commentator remarks that there may be word-play, where the interlocutor uses the future in the polite sense, and where the Buddha replies as if the future were literally intended. Allon discusses the point exhaustively.

It fits with this complexity that the status and attributes of a Buddha are held to be ineffable. The question where the Tathāgata – that is, the Buddha - goes after death is one of those questions which he regularly refuses to answer. [67] This is in part because the question is unprofitable, but seems also to be because a Buddha is *sui generis*, covered by no familiar category, and - beyond this - that he represents the noumenal within the world of phenomena, admitting of none of the predication applicable only to phenomena.

Though not a god, the Buddha is found everywhere to be worshipped in a manner indistinguishable from that of a god. Robert Knox, when a prisoner in Ceylon in the 17th Century, observed the religion practised about him, and understood it in that way.[68] On any comparative study of religions that works by way of structure, and which within that structure has a slot for God, that 'slot' in the Buddhist case is filled by the Buddha. Otherwise put, the Buddha is an object of the devotion accorded a god, though this is not the perfervid devotion (*bhakti*) often accorded Hindu divinities. He is also an exemplar. It is tempting to say, simply, that the record presents him as the type of human perfection. This would be true enough were it possible for an abstraction, 'perfection', to be realised in narrative. As it is, the record strains against impossibility to accomplish this. Exemplary <u>actions</u> are presented, a beautiful example being a well-known story found in the Pali Vinaya. [69] The Buddha finds a *bhikkhu* ill and left alone by the others, seemingly suffering from something like dysentery and lying in his own excrement. With his attendant, Ananda, the Buddha washes the sick man's body, then summons the other *bhikkhavaḥ* (plural) and rebukes them. To all the other reasons why they should care for the sick he adds this: *yo ... mam upaṭṭhaheya so golanam upaṭṭhaheyya* (anyone who wants to care for me should care for the sick). Devotion to the Buddha, 'caring' for him, is taken for granted. By itself it can take one to heaven.[70] It is what follows from it that needs emphasis.

The first part of the three-fold formula by which Buddhist profession is made is *Buddhaṃ saranaṃ gacchāmi* (I go for refuge to the Buddha). The other two 'refuges'

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[67] An instance is his refusal to answer Vacchagotta in the terms requested. See MN No.72.
[68] KNOX, p 136
[69] *Vinaya Piṭaka*, *Mahāvagga* VIII [301]; translation Vol.IV, p.431.
[70] MN No. 22. For the 'planes' of future existence, see p. 59/60. For rebirth in heaven, see p.113/14.

are the Dharma ((here) the teaching) and the Sangha (the monastic order). The three go together. The Buddha regularly identifies himself with the Dharma, presenting it as a 'ruler' and as the object of prime concern. [71] In the record of his last few weeks, he is shown to be reconciling his followers, the Sangha, to his absence. [72] There is, therefore, a sense in which Buddhist ethics can stand by itself: its claims to acceptance are not greatly diminished if its founder is left out of account, as the salvic power of his teaching would still conduce to the end of suffering. At the same time, the practitioner makes a commitment to beliefs, orientations, devotions and practices – that is, to a complex which finds its cohesive principle in the Buddha. It is here that commitments, moral exertions and doctrinal affirmations come together. It is in the element of worship, through the worship of the Buddha, that we find the seal and the solder. The lasting popular appeal of Buddhism would not have obtained without this fusion.

12. Living by way of precept

Soon after his enlightenment - the tradition has it - the Buddha journeyed to a park outside Benares. There he delivered an address to a small audience of renunciants, the *Dharmacakrapravartana* ((literally) the setting -rolling of the law-wheel; the first declaration of the teaching).[73] Here is to be found the first presentation of the four *āryasatyāni* (noble Truths, or Truths of the Noble One). These are set out on the model of medical diagnosis: sickness, the cause of sickness, the cure, and the way to the cure. The Buddha declares the unsatisfactoriness, disturbance and suffering (*duḥkha/dukkha*) of existence within *saṃsāra* (the world of experience and rebirth); ascribes the cause of this, literally, to 'thirst' (*tṛṣṇa/tanhā*) - that is, to craving, grasping, attachment; declares the cure to be cessation (*nirodha*), synonymous with Nirvana/ Nibbana; and reveals the way to the cure, the *āryāstaṅgamarga* (the noble eight-fold Path, or the eight-fold Path of the Noble One) or, simply, the *marga*, identified with the *madhyama pratipad* (the Middle Way).

[71] AN III 14 [109/10] and elsewhere.
[72] DN II No.16 [144]. *Alam ānanda mā soci ma paridevi ... Taṃ kutettha ānanda labbhā 'yantaṃ jātaṃ bhutaṃ saṅkhataṃ palokadhammṃṃ, taṃ vata tathāgatassāpi sarīraṃ māpalujjati.* Loosely translated, this means: 'Don't weep and wail, Ananda ... Everything born and come into being and compounded will naturally break up. How could the body of the Tathāgata escape being broken up?'
[73] The Pali version is at SN V 56 [420]

Duḥkha/dukkha, proclaimed by the first Truth, is one of the three ‘marks’ of *saṃsāra*. The three characterise what is to be found in *saṃsāra* or endured there. The other two marks are *anitya/anicca* (impermanence) and *anātman/anattā* (lack of self). The three are interdependent and concurrent. These are the three *lakṣaṇāḥ/lakkhaṇā* (marks), to which I will return in Chapter Three in discussing *anātman/anattā*. [74]

In the last of the four *āryasatyāni*, that proclaiming the *marga*, we have the ultimate basis for a system of auto-prescription, by way of the acknowledgement of precepts, which are then taken to be guidelines for action. The precepts are grounded in the *āryasatyāni* as a whole, taken to be a setting-out of the facts of existence. Each of the eight components of the *marga* is declared to be *samyak*. This is usually translated ‘right’, and has a suggestion of consistent, harmonious progress. The terms so qualified are, in Sanskrit: *dṛṣṭi* (view), *saṃkalpa* (intention/ thought), *vāk* (speech), *karmanta* (action), *ājīva* (livlihood), *vyāyāma* (effort/exertion), *smṛti* (mindfulness), and *samādhi* (concentration/absorption). The eight glosses are rough-and-ready; the first two terms and the last two - especially - elude one-word translation.

In this context, *śīla/sila* (morality) picks out three of the eight, being a matter of right speech, action and livelihood. It goes with and supports, and should itself be supported by, the development of *prajñā/paññā* (wisdom), the first two components of the *marga*, and of *bhāvanā* (self-development through meditation), the last three. [75] The *marga* as a whole is directed towards the ‘cure’ and end, Nirvana. In the whole scheme, therefore, *śīla* may be regarded instrumentally: one acts – it may be said ‘morally’ - with a view to an end.

We find mention of differing ways or degrees in the following of the Path. In the early texts, we find two levels of prescription: the Buddha prescribes one form of practice to one class of follower, usually lay-people, and another to the other class, usually those granted entry to the Sangha. The former is caught by the three words, *dāna* (giving, generosity), *śīl*a, and *śvarga* (heaven – by which is meant immediate well-being and/or

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[74] AN III 134.
[75] The Buddha is recorded as teaching the interdependence of the three in the record of his last days. *Mahāparinibbānasutta* DN 16 [81]. In the *Visuddhimagga*, morality is dealt with first and wisdom last. See below.

a good rebirth). [76] The latter is the full practice of the eight-fold Path. Another distinction is expressed in Buddhaghosa's summation of Buddhist doctrine and practice, the Pali *Visuddhimagga.* It is between a mundane (*lokiya*) and a supermundane (*lokuttara*) following of the Path[77]. *Lokuttara* practice is reserved to those close to Nirvana - to put it technically, to who have 'entered the stream'. How we should understand Nirvana/Nibbana is notoriously hard to state, but the point of immediate concern is that it represents the end of rebirth. Nirvana is the goal for anyone who accepts the Buddha's teaching and who practises as he taught. For almost everyone, however, it cannot be the immediate goal, which is, rather, a good rebirth. A succession of good rebirths is a large advance towards Nirvana. The conception is not one of different goals, but of a single goal, not – for most of us – quickly or readily approached. Here is the sphere of *lokiya* practice. It is presented as an adjustment of the order of the categories of component of the Path, the three components of *śīla* coming first. This is the ordering which gives the *Visuddhimagga* its structure. It is a departure from the order of the Buddha's first sermon, but no surprising one, as *śīla* can be supposed to be what the ordinary man most urgently needs to attend to.[78]

13. The content of *śīla*

I have translated the word *Śīla/sīla* as 'virtue', which is not contentious. In the *Mettāsutta*, which I will shortly quote in full, *sīlavā* can only be 'virtuous'. We will see shortly that the word is also rendered ''precept' or 'prescription for action'. Lexicographers find its prime meaning in 'nature', 'conduct' and 'habituation'. These various meanings have a natural coherence. Sometimes, the Pali word which must mean 'precepts' is not *sīlāni* but *dhammā* (both plural forms). [79] This suggests that *sīla* was only in course of becoming a term of art in the Buddha's time.

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[76] AN VIII 36

[77] Vism [13]. The distinction is found in the early texts at MN No. 117

[78] What I have summarised here is the orthodoxy of contemporary Buddhism. It has been challenged by Masefield, who argues that the earliest Buddhist teaching knew no distinction between a mundane and a supermundane following of the Path. Only the latter was available, and entry to it was by way of achieving the first step on the Path. A probable condition of this first achievement was the practitioner's all-transforming contact with the Buddha. There is no room here for discussion of this challenge. I observe only that the development Masefield finds inauthentic was an indispensable condition of the development of Buddhism into an enduring and widely diffused religion. See MASEFIELD.

[79] See Bibliograpy for details of the Sanskrit and Pali dictionaries on which I have relied.

I have just brought out the centrality of prescription in Buddhist ethics. The *āryāstaṅgamarga* is its most general form, governing more particular systems. The Vinaya, in its various recensions, sets out rules for monks which are numerous and precise. This is, effectively, legislation; serious breaches of the rules will result in expulsion from the Sangha. In the Pali Nikayas and their equivalents there is something comparable for laypeople and for those not fully professed. This is not legislation, but is offered for guidance, acceptance and auto-prescription. I will be concerned with two of these presentations in list-form, both drawn from Pali sources.

One is the *Dasakusalakammapatha* (list (or way) of ten good actions). This may be found expressed in terms of avoidance – that is, of the avoidance of the corresponding ten bad actions – and structured to cover, successively, bodily, verbal and mental action (or attitude). [80] The correction of the first of these, then of the second, is the most urgent concern and also the easier; the correction of the last is the deepest concern and the harder to bring about. It is this last that should be noted. Its three components are the mental factors *lobha* (greed), *dveśa/dosa* (hatred) and *moha* (delusion, or distorted view). Here are the so-called 'three fires' or *akuśala* (bad) *mūlāni* (roots (here in the sense of basic propensities or factors of motivation)). [81] Their inclusion in the list seems to extend its scope beyond *śīla*, as narrowly defined, to the second component of the eight-fold path, *samyak saṃkalpa* (Right Intention/Thought). This too needs to be purified. The 'three fires' are of prime importance in the Buddhist scheme. As I will show below, they are the defining factor of 'bad' *karman*.

The second list, which may be called the precept-list, is at the heart of Buddhist practice. If the *Dasakusalakammapatha* is for everyone, as the context often suggests, the precept-list is for the lay follower, *upāsaka* or (feminine) *upāsakā.* It is found in five-fold, eight-fold and ten-fold versions. The first of these, in Pali the *pañca silāni* (the five precepts), functions as a statement of the basic moral standard for the Buddhist

[80] The Pali Saleyyakasutta records the Buddha's address to the *brāhmana* householders of the village of Sala. The *Dasakusalakammapatha* is to be found in the context of his exposition of the conditioning of rebirth by conduct: *adhammacariyā visamacariyā hetu kho gahapatiyo evamidhekacce sattā kāyassa bhedā parammaraṇā apāyaṃ duggatiṃ vinipātaṃ nirayaṃ upapajjanti* (Householders, on account of conduct incompatible with Dhamma and which is unrighteous, some beings, on the breaking-up of the body at death, arise in deprived and miserable states or in hell). The opposite conduct is declared to issue in the opposite destiny. MN No.41 [285]

[81] Set out by thenselves at AN III 33 [134/35]

layman. It begins with an undertaking to live harmlessly: *pānatipātā veramini sikkhāpadam samadiyāmi* (I undertake the training-rule of avoidance of injury to living things). There follows the same undertaking in respect of *adinnādana* (taking what is not given), *kāmesu micchcāra* (wrongdoing with regard to the senses, especially sex), *musāvāda* (falsehood), and *surameraya majja pamādatthāna* (the state of torpor and intoxication resulting from strong drink). [82] The first four of these five follow the bodily and verbal prescriptions of the *Dasakusalakammapatha*. The eight-fold version of the second list substitutes *brahmacariya* (sexual abstinence) for *kāmesu micchācāra* and adds, as points of avoidance, eating after midday and such indulgencies as luxury in furniture, personal adornment and entertainments. The ten-fold version presents the eight-fold version as nine-fold and adds one further abstention, that from handling money.

The three forms of the list can be seen to make up a progression. Within the five-fold version, the first four *silāni* are plainly matters of social morality. The fifth appears to be a condition of Right Mindfulness (*samyak smṛṭti/sati*) and so a condition of the observance of the other four. With the eight-fold version an ascetic standard is added to the ethical. The use of a high and capacious bed (*uccāsayana mahāsayana*) need not be given up in the way in which falsehood (*musāvāda*) should be given up: what harm can my sleeping arrangements do to others? Its abandonment can however be seen as an element in the moderate asceticism that goes with the following of the Path. The ten-fold version clearly adds renunciation to asceticism: there can be no viable existence in the world without money. As such, it is a further step and is the form of the precepts normally taken by monastic novices.

The precepts are adopted through trust in the Buddha and by virtue of their own appeal. Their application calls for sensitivity and insight – qualities which *bhāvanā* (the practice of meditation) should develop – and is analogous to the treading of a way along a path. Here is the following of the *madhyama pratipad*, not only the threading of a way between extremes, but also progress in the light of appreciation of all the facts of

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[82] The *pañca sīlāni* are found everywhere in the Buddhist record, often in combination with other points of moral teaching. A good example is the *Mahānāmasutta* at AN 8.1.3.5 [220/21]. Here the precepts are set out after the three Refuges and before a general account of the virtuous life. After expounding them, the Buddha declares: *Ettāvatā kho mahānāma upāsako sīlavā hoti* (So far, Mahanama, the *upāsaka* is virtuous).

the matter. Two examples may illustrate this. *Pānatipata* may seem not too difficult to avoid. I can easily avoid killing people and with a little care, avoid killing even insects. The precept points beyond this towards the cutting short of any approval of killing by others – for instance, by partisans of a cause to which I may be sympathetic - or any satisfaction in such acts. [83] The avoidance of *adinnādāna* is comparable. Reflection may suggest that what is *kuśala* (good, skilful) in this respect goes beyond not taking objects; it extends to not seeking information, as a moral discipline on curiosity. Skilful action, in line with reflection, may make the following of a precept more demanding, not less.

14. The application of *śīla*: some difficulties

The first, second and fifth components of the five-fold list are specific: what not to do is spelled out. The third and fourth proscribe 'wrong-doing', more generally, within specified areas. It may be be a question what this amounts to. The Pali *Sāleyyakasutta* defines it in respect of *musāvāda*:

> Here .. someone speaks falsehood: when summoned to a court, or to a meeting … and questioned as a witness: 'So, good man, tell what you know', not knowing, he says, 'I know', or knowing, he says, 'I do not know' … in full awareness he speaks falsehood for his own ends ... [84]

[83] This is evident from the progression of bodily, verbal and mental abstentions in the *Dasakusalakammapatha.* The first of these is only the start. Endorsement of killing can only be rooted in *dveśa/dosa* (ill-will, hatred). The relevance of this will emerge in Chapter Seven.

[84] *Idha … ekacco musāvadī hoti sabhāgato vā parisagato vā … abhinīto sakkhipuṭṭho: 'ehambho purisa yaṃ janāsi taṃ vadehīti. So ajānaṃ vā aha na jānāmīti jānaṃ vā aha na jānāmīti .. Iti attahetu … sampajānamusā bhāsita hoti.*

The amplification of *kāmesu micchācāra* in the same text shows that the case is not always so simple:

> He misconducts himself in sensual pleasures; he has intercourse with women who are protected by their mother, father, … brother … who are protected by law, who have a husband, and even with those who are garlanded in token of betrothal ... [85]

The thought behind this selection of instances is clearly that wrong would be done to the woman's 'protector', her effective owner, and that this wrong should be avoided on the principle, as it appears, of the other three of the first four *silāni*, that of avoiding wrong-doing towards others. Here is a view of the matter likely to be found anachronistic. Its application seems correspondingly limited. How can Enlightenment, it may be urged, be so conditioned by cultural norms?

The answer is that prescriptions of action derived from general principles need not be rigid to be authentic. A precept is a fixed point, while its application is a matter for reflection. Reflection can only occur in a context, and contexts will differ. Whatever the context, the application of the precept will be governed by intention and attitude. Where these are grounded in the three *kuśala mūlāni* (good roots), the line of action which follows will be *kuŚala/kusala.*[86] This being so, nothing of significance is given up in granting the cultural specificity sometimes found in the Buddha's expositions.

It is here too that we find the answer to another criticism, sometimes made, that the emphasis of Buddhist ethics is 'negative'. The first four precepts, whose application will be a matter for reflection, can readily be given a positive form. The first precept, not killing, can be developed, first, into doing no harm of any kind and, second, into positive benevolence. With such a development, even the lower road - that made up of *dāna, śīla* and *śvarga* - can be seen to be highly demanding. There is no limit, beyond

[85] *Kāmesu micchācarī kho pana hoti, yā ta māturakkhitā piturakkhitā ... bhāturakkkhitā ... dhammarakkhitā ... sassāmikā .. antamaso mālagunaparikkhittāpi ... tathārūpāsu cārittaṃ āpajjita hoti...*

[86] For the *akuśala mūlāni,* or 'three fires', see above, p.41. The *kuśala mūlāni* are their opposites. I discuss *kuśala/kusala* below.

what is self-imposed, to the practice of generosity (*dāna*) and benevolence (*śīla* with a positive emphasis). The third stage, *śvarga* (happiness in this life, or a good rebirth or both) can be seen as the natural outcome - not the sole motivation - of this demanding practice. This is to say that this third strand in Buddhist ethics (of those I have picked out) is not confined to the following of rules, whether explicit in the texts or – to some degree – to be worked out by the practitioner. The third strand – that is, *śīla* – extends to the cultivation of good qualities, of positive value as *kuśala*, which may as well be called perfections or virtues.[87] This was to become far more conspicuous in the Mahayana, though no more of the essence, than in the practice of our concern. [88]

This positive emphasis in the sphere of morality is deeply connected with practice within another division of the *marga*, that of self-cultivation or meditative practice (*bhāvanā*). To bring this out, I now quote in full, making the translation more literal than usual, one of the most celebrated Buddhist texts, the Pali *Mettāsutta*. [89] This text is a complete illustration of the working of the Path. Its quotation will show the place of components other than the three strictly constituting *śīla* and present their common operation. It will also serve as a summing up of what has been said above about *śīla*, and support my rebuttal of the charge of negativity.

The sutta opens with an exposition of *Śīla*, to use the Pali term here and below, in the sense of self-training. The training is clearly that of a *bhikkhu*, whose Right Livelihood is living simply and taking alms only in a proper way. Then comes the meditative practice of friendliness - or of loving-kindness, as *mettā* is sometimes rendered - falling within the sphere of Right Concentration/ Absorption (*samādhi*). There follows some account of this practice and its merits and, finally, an emphasis on Right Mindfulness (*smṛṭi/sati*) and the assurance of an end to rebirth:

> What ought to be done by one skilled in the good
> (*atthakusalena*), who wishes to attain that calm state

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[87] Pali *pāramī*, and Sanskrit *pāramitā* (state of perfection). The basic sense is 'going beyond'.

[88] Bhikkhu Bodhi has made available in translation a commentary on the perfections, 'found in at least two places in the Pali exegetical literature'. It appears to have the *Visuddhimagga* behind it, and to fall outside our period. The author's discussion of the virtues is very much in Aristotle's style, properly Buddhist though they are. See BHIKKU BODHI.

[89] *Khuddaka Nikaya*, 1,9 [8].

(*santam padam*, ie Nirvana), is that he should be sincere upright and conscientious, of right speech, gentle and not arrogant, contented, living simply, peaceful and unburdened, with senses calmed, prudent, modest, not grasping among the dwellings (*kulesu ananugiddho* - that is, not anxious for support as a mendicant). He should not do anything trifling, for which other wise men would blame (him).

‘May all beings be happy and secure, may they be happy in themselves (*sukhitattā*), the feeble and strong altogether, tall, big or medium, short, small or large, seen or unseen, those who live far or near, in being or wishing for birth (*saṃbhavesi*), may all beings be happy in themselves’. Let no one deceive another, or despise anyone anywhere. Let him not wish harm (*dukkham*), through anger or repugnance, to any one at all. Just as a mother would protect her only child with her life, so let him cultivate a boundless heart (*mānasam*) towards all beings. Let him cultivate friendliness (*mettam*) everywhere, a boundless heart above, below and around, one without obstruction, hatred or enmity. Standing, walking, sitting or in bed - while he is awake, he should maintain this mindfulness (*satim*). This is said to be the godlike state/dwelling (*brahmam vihāram*) here. Not being attached to (false) views, virtuous (*sīlavā*), endowed with insight/vision (*dassanena*), giving up greed with regard to the senses, he indeed does not go again into the womb.[90]

[90] *Karanīyam atthakusalena yam tam santam padam abhisamecca/ sakko ūju ca sūjū ca suvaco c’assa mudu anatimāni// Santussako ca subharo ca apakicco ca sallahukavutti/ santindriyo ca nipako ca appagabho kulesu ananugiddho// Na ca khuddam samācare kiñci yena viññūpare upavadeyyum/ sukhino vā khemino hontu sabbe sattā bhavantu sukhitattā// Ye keci pānabhuttatthi tasā vā thāvarā vā anavasesā/ dighā vā ye mahantā vā sabbe sattā bhavantu sukhitattā// Na paro param nikubbetha nātimaññetha katthacinam kañci/ byārosanā patighasaññā nāññamaññassa dukkham iccheyya// Mātā yatha niyam puttam āyusā ekaputtam anurakkhe/ evam pi sabbabhūtesu mānasam bhāvaye aparimānam// Mettañ ca sabbalokasmin mānasam bhāvaye aparimānam/ uddham adho ca tiriyañca*

This text makes it plain that the stress on negative prescription is not such to exclude a strongly positive emphasis. [91] It may none the less prompt the suggestion that Buddhist ethics is marked by certain limitations. Two of these can be discussed together. One is that Buddhist ethics is concerned with the perfection of the individual at least to the relative disregard of others. A second is that the tradition has too little to say about life in the world. These weaknesses, if they are such, seem to have a common source. If the prime concern is with the progress of a very few, almost certainly members of the Sangha, other concerns will be subordinate.

An answer to the first charge is simply given. What is expressed in the *Mettāsutta* is indeed the perfection of the practitioner. At the same time, the text is an eloquent expression of concern for others and, more remarkably, of the ending of the distinction between those others and the self. What this makes clear is that there is an innocent self-concern directed to the purification of that self's connections with others. The perfection of the self, on the Buddhist view, memorably expressed in this text, is by way of the disregard of the self.

The case with the second charge is not altogether different, though here some concession is necessary. It must, I think, be granted that the Buddhist tradition has not developed a tradition of concern for the problems of lay life as rich as that concerned with that of the professed. This should not be overstated, as the Buddha is often recorded as talking to lay people. We find exhortation to rulers on how to rule, how to deal with poverty and malefactors, and so on. There is much advice on how to lead a harmless, virtuous life and on how to be as happy as life in *saṃsāra* permits. All this is far from nothing. But there is, I believe, some force in the point that this is secondary and that Buddhist social morality is a thinner and less developed thing than the corresponding strain in the other 'great' religions.

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asambādham averam asapattam// Tittham caram nisinno vā sayāno vā yāvat'assa vigatamiddho/ etam satim adhittheyya Brahman etam vihāram idha māhu// Ditthiñ ca anupagamma sīlavā dassanena sampanno/ kāmesu vinneya gedham na hi jātu gabbhaseyyam punar etī' ti.

[91] This claim is developed strongly by Cooper and James in the course of their presentation of the Buddhist scheme as a form of virtue ethics. See COOPER & JAMES *passim*, especially pp.54/55.

This must be attributable, in part, to a lack of necessity. There was no tradition of thought in India outside the brahmanical tradition and those formed in reaction to it. I have sought to show how that tradition was revalued by the Buddha for his own purposes. This, in the Indian context, must have seemed both sufficient and distinctive. It must be attributable also to the symbiosis of Sangha and world, taken to be something plainly good for the world. The world derives knowledge of the Dharma from the Sangha. The early texts point bear witness to a plethora of benefits flowing to the world from the relationship. Typical are two suttas within the Pali *Majjhima Nikāya*, where it is shown how the diligent practice of some monks is for the benefit of all the laity around. It is even said to illuminate the wood in which they dwell. [92] Here, again, is the answer to the charge of self-concern, where this has to be understood in an exclusive sense. I will return to consideration of this charge in Chapter Five, where, in discussion of Parfit's treatment of Sidgwick, I will suggest further grounds for thinking it mistaken. In Chapter Seven, taking stock after considering Parfit's work as a whole, I will revert to it in summing up.

The *Mettāsutta* may also prompt a criticism of an entirely different order. In a critique of utilitarianism, Bernard Williams insists that a human life finds much of its value in the development of projects and attitudes which can be fitted only with difficulty into a utilitarian calculus, and that these ought not to be sacrificed to the demands of such a calculus. [93] Some forms of utilitarianism are indeed highly demanding, sufficiently so to suggest a parallel with the universal self-denying benevolence expressed by the *Mettāsutta*. The cultivation of universal benevolence seems incompatible with particular affections and loyalties, and with everything else that marks out and gives value to a human life. With this comes an invocation of the old saw that the best may be the enemy of the good. In trying to universalise *mettā*, the practitioner may come to care less for the immediate and the particular.

The response to reservations of this kind this has to be by way of recalling the variety of ways of following the path. The practitioner supposed by the *Mettāsutta* is plainly

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[92] MN No.31 & 32.

[93] SMART & WILLIAMS. In a footnote to p 114, Williams refers to 'resemblances in spirit between utilitarianism and high-minded evangelical Christianity'. I am pointing also to a resemblance to an apparent resemblance to Buddhism.

very far along this path. The *pṛthagjana/puthujjana* ('plain man', ordinary person) who hears it should admire the ideal and accept the practice as his or her ultimate goal. It does not follow that he or she should adopt it at once and without modification. There are degrees and levels of practice, with an acceptance of distinctions and gradations.

15. Buddhist ethics as Naturalist

Characterisation of Buddhist ethics finds a ready starting-point in the understanding of the word *kuśala* (Pali *kusala*). (This has the antonym *akuśala* (Pali *akusala*)). I have already used the word, in disregard of its complexities. How it should be translated has been the subject of debate. In translating the *Mettāsutta*, I took *atthakusala* to mean '(one who is) skilled (*kusala*) in the good'. Other renderings, such as 'skilful in well-being', would have been defensible. In their application to the *mūlāni* (roots), I have taken the Pali *kusala* and *akusala* to be 'good' and 'bad' respectively. [94] Discussion has ranged over the breadth of meaning which these translations suggest, and over whether the word has a primary significance, one of the those instanced – 'skilful', 'good' - or yet another. It has extended to such points of doubt as the 'skill' caught by the reference to 'skilful' action, and the distinction, if there is a distinction here, of 'moral' and 'non-moral' good.

The debate has been too complex for summary here. It may be enough if I state a position and draw out its implications.[95] What I maintain is that the Buddhist ethical scheme is a case of ethical naturalism. By 'naturalism', in the present context, I mean a theory of ethics under which 'moral' terms are definable in non-moral terms and moral judgments are a kind of empirical judgments. Some such definition is implied in

[94] Sections 13 & 14 above
[95] The field of debate has been surveyed exhaustively by Cousins, and from a different perspective by Schmithausen. Much of the ground was covered by Keown in a book published slightly earlier than Cousins' article. See COUSINS (1), KEOWN, pp 116 –128, and SCHMITHAUSEN.

Hume's three-fold opposition to 'natural': 'unusual, miraculous or artificial'.[96] It is the sense of 'natural' that is opposed to 'miraculous' that is of our concern. To say that the Buddhist ethical scheme is naturalist is to say that the processes which the term seems to cover are governed by the laws operative within *saṃsāra*. Terms commonly marked out as 'moral' are to be analysed along naturalist lines.

If I am right in this, our understanding of the notion of the *kuśala* should fall into place. There will also be consequences for our understanding of *karman*. In Chapter One, I presented the notion of *karman* as one of ethically conditioned consequence. The agent bears the consequences of what he or she does, for good or bad. I might as pointedly have said that it is the nature of *karman* to be *kuśala* or *akuśala*. We find in the early texts the claim that intentional action – that is, of the kind that is karmically potent - will have its outcome, or *vipāka* (fruiting), determined by the quality of the volition. [97] Action will have been, and outcome will be, either *kuśala* or *akuśala*. [98] Every outcome will sooner or later be registered in the life of the subject, whether the present life or one to follow, not necessarily the next. It will be a determining factor in the subject's rebirth. None of this is straightforward, and I will discuss *karman* and its considerable perplexities more fully in Chapter Four.

Some remarks by Winston King also suggest this conclusion, though it is not King's conclusion.[99] In the course of a useful account of Buddhist ethics, based on his observations of contemporary Burma, he writes:

> There is the further factor of the ambiguous ethical quality of the kammic process itself. What indeed <u>is</u> the true meaning of ethical badness and goodness in the kammic context? …. When 'bad' and 'good' are used to describe the kammic cause, i.e. those actions which produce kammically determined results in the future, they

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[96] HUME (2): footnote to Appendix III, p.307.

[97] A good example is the words of Yama already quoted. See p.9 above.

[98] To avoid confusion, I should explain that both in the early sources and in contemporary discussion the word *karman* is commonly used both for the action that brings about the outcome – its strict sense - and for the whole process of action and outcome. This latter process is, strictly, one of *karman* and *vipāka*.

[99] KING, p 72

> are used in the purely ethical sense of ethically desirable or undesirable actions. But when the same adjectives are used with regard to kammic result, i.e. those states or conditions that follow from the morally good or bad causes in accordance with the law of Kamma, then they are usually defined in materialistic and hedonistic terms. That is to say: the 'good' result of an ethically 'good' action, such as a charitable deed, is a state of pleasurable existence replete with such non-moral, materialistic goods as health, beauty, wealth …..(King's emphasis)

This brings out a problem clearly enough. On King's presumptions, I take it to be insoluble. Only an understanding that over-rides his sharp distinction of 'moral' and 'non-moral' has any chance of being made coherent.[100] It is on the appreciation of this that I ground my claim that the Buddhist ethical scheme should be seen as naturalist. It seems to follow that what is *kuśala* is best understood in terms of *karman*. The word should be left untranslated, to figure as a term of art, and to be understood as 'that which brings about 'good' – that is, agreeable – *karman.' Akuśala* would be taken to do the reverse.

This is not uncontentious and not without its difficulties. My claim that *kuśala* and *akuśala* are terms of art is supported only imperfectly by the sources. While the two words often have a technical and scholastic application which makes them distinctive, they seem at times to be interchangeable with other terms of approbation and reprobation, in particular with *puñya/puñña* and its opposite*, pāpa. Puñya* is also a word of debatable translation, but is commonly rendered 'virtuous'. My claim is, moreover, one that is hard to support by quotation, being founded more on a broad impression of the early sources than on particular instances. Cousins' conclusions, after discussion of the same point, offer support. [101] He agrees with Premasiri that

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[100] Hursthouse offers a useful summary of contributions to the continuing debate from Anscombe and Foot: '.. following Anscombe, [Foot] denied that this grammatical feature of the word 'good' … underwent a mysterious change when we started doing ethics. What goes for 'good cactus', 'good knife', 'good rider', also goes for 'good human being' even when we use that phrase in ethics.' See HURSTHOUSE (2), p.195.

[101] COUSINS (1)

> although there is some overlapping, *puñña* is most often used in regard to actions intended to bring about results of a pleasant kind in the future. It is almost exclusively *kusala* which is used in relation to the Buddha's path. Indeed [one may go further and suggest] that *puñña* was almost certainly not a technical term in the thought of the Buddha and his early disciples….

This is, I think, correct, and I conclude with added confidence that there is nothing in the moral vocabulary which we find employed in the early sources to point against recognising the Buddhist ethical scheme as naturalist. Keown's survey of recent commentators and his own conclusions suggest that this is a common recognition.[102] I take *kuśala* and *akuśala* to be terms of art, applying to what produces 'good' and 'bad' karmic consequence or *vipāka* – that is, 'agreeable' or 'favourable' consequence, or the opposite. What will in practice be called *kuśala* or *akuśala*, when these words are used as terms of art, will be those volitions and actions commonly called *puñya* - or *bhadra, sādhu*, or something similar - and their antonyms. These terms retain their common commendatory meaning, which becomes no weaker with the scholastic development of *kuśala* and *akuśala*. I am not saying that *puñya* and its near-synonyms should be accorded, in step with that development, a reductive definition. What I am suggesting is that where a contemporary open to the Buddha's influence would have judged an act of generosity – for instance – as *puñya*, he might have found it also to be *kuśala* in respect of its place within the karmic scheme.[103] The likelihood of his doing so must remain a matter of some uncertainty.

16. Naturalist and Prescriptivist?

[102] KEOWN, pp 7,23, 232

[103] Cooper and James make the same point. They refer to Harvey in stressing that an act is not to be held to be wrong because it produces 'bad' *karman.* See COOPER & JAMES, p.40, and HARVEY (2) p.59. See also the same point made outside the context of the Buddha's teaching by Hursthouse: 'No virtue ethics inspired by Aristotle is committed to a reductive definition of the concepts of 'good' and 'evil' in terms of that of the virtuous agent …' See HURSTHOUSE (2) p.81.

An incompatibility has been found between naturalism and accounts of morality which give a central role to prescription. Hare makes much of this.

> … the naturalist kind of descriptivism leads inevitably to relativism. There are in most languages words which we translate 'wrong'. These words are, as they are used, rough equivalents to one another. But the cultures that use these words call quite different things wrong ….. What is wrong with naturalism … is that it pretends that what are in fact substantial moral principles are nothing more than linguistic rules. [104]

That the Buddhist scheme is a prescriptive – or 'prescriptivist' - account is hardly disputable. It matters little that neither the *marga*, by way of its components, nor the verbal expression of the precepts is in the imperative mode. It is enough that the *marga* is to be *bhāvitabbam* (to be cultivated, brought about). The Buddha declares that in his own case it <u>has</u> been so cultivated (*bhāvitam*).[105] The *marga* is plainly action-guiding, serving as the cap of a system of descending, ever more detailed, injunctions, to be realised in the life of every practitioner. [106] All this derives from the *āryasatyāni*, more particularly from the components of the *āryāstaṅgamarga*, and it is only on this foundation that they are action-guiding. The *āryasatyāni* are valid, on any Buddhist view, for all times and all people. On this view, the principles derived from the *satyāni* and based on the prescriptions of the *marga* will be safe from the disabling relativism to which naturalist systems have been said to be liable. This goes to the heart of Hare's objection.

If Hare had been familiar with Buddhist notions, he might have drawn on them for support. They suggest an answer to a widespread criticism of some assertions in an early statement of his own version of prescriptivism: he appears to claim that, if a

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[104] HARE(4) p.68.
[105] See the account of the Buddha's enlightenment in the Pali *Dhammacakkapavattanasutta* (SN V [420]) and elsewhere.
[106] See section 13 above.

structure of imperatives is fully coherent and so worked out as to take everything relevant into account, that is all that can be required. It seems to follow that there is no basis on which it might be criticised:

> A complete justification of a decision would consist of a complete account of its effects, together with a complete account of the principles which it observed, and the effects of observing those principles ….. If the inquirer still goes on asking 'but why should I live like that?' then there is no further answer to give him …[107]

The Buddhist can say that the ultimate principles from which precepts and other forms of prescription derive enjoy the authority of the Buddha and are grounded in his perfect insight. The Buddha sees things as they are. If we follow the Buddha, there is this 'further answer'.

17. Virtue ethics: the Aristotelian comparison

By 'virtue ethics', I mean - at its barest - the tradition of moral thought which is characterised by its focus on commendable dispositions. In contemporary meta-ethical theory, where the term is most at home, it is this focus which marks off virtue ethics from other lines of thought. In its Western manifestation, the grounding of virtue ethics is to be found in Plato, in Aristotle – especially - and in the early Stoics. It is here that a useful, if limited, comparison is available. It may have been evident from what has been said already that Buddhist ethics has much of an Aristotelian form and something, if much less, of an Aristotelian content. By 'form', in this context, I have in mind the conception of the moral life as one that in large part consists of the exercise of human capacities with a view to an end. This may be conceived as a progress, inviting perhaps the image of a path. All this is to be done with skill and self-awareness, as if by treading a middle way between extremes of action.

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[107] HARE (1) p.69. It should be said that Hare seems to have modified this position in his later works.

All this raises the question of what the 'end' should be. How is it found? Aristotle's presentation of the *telos* of action is hardly argued for, but rather taken for granted. This is because it is grounded in biological determination: the proper end of a man is evident from realisation of what a man is.[108] Macintyre makes this point well:

> Within that teleological scheme [that of the *Nicomachean Ethics*] there is a fundamental contrast between man-as-he-happens-to-be and man-as-he-could-be-if-he-realised-his-essential-nature. Ethics is the science which is to enable men to understand how they make the transition from the former state to the latter. Ethics … presupposes … some account of man as a rational animal and above all some account of the human telos.[109]

This will be a problem for the proponent of virtue ethics, if only because Aristotle's scientific understanding cannot be ours. If we take the human animal to be the product of a process of evolution, we may be unready to accord it a *telos* of quite other provenance.

I will deal below with contemporary presentations of virtue ethics which are alert to this complication. For the present, I am concerned only to point out a parallel. This is between the form of Aristotle's presentation and that of the Buddhists. For the Buddhists, progress towards the end is by way of practice within the three-part grouping of the eight components of the marga towards an end, which is *nirodha* (or Nirvana). This may be seen as the *madhyama pratipad* (middle way), primarily the way between indulgence and self-harm, but also the exercise of a developing power of skilful action. [110] While the stress is more on the skill, on what is *kuśala*, than on a mid-way

[108] This grounding is conspicuous in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. A clear expression of it is to found around 1097b and 1098a. ARISTOTLE (3)
[109] MACINTYRE p.55.
[110] I cannot share Keown's view that favouring 'skilful' as the normal translation of *kuśala/kusala* carries with it acceptance of a Utilitarian conception of Buddhist ethics. See KEOWN, p 119.

positioning between two extremes, there seems to be a true resemblance between the *madhyma pratipad*, so prominent in the Buddha's first sermon, and Aristotle's intermediary positioning of the virtues.

As for the content of morality, a degree of similarity should have been evident from my discussion of naturalism. There is a parallel in the psychological grounding of action between the Aristotelian conception of the multi-layered soul and the Buddhist diagnosis of the rooted-ness of 'unhappy' and 'happy' qualities. In neither scheme is there any abstraction of choice into some state of purity. Aristotle takes it for granted that the good for man is what men want or – rather – what they want if they have been well brought up or have reflected deeply. His concluding treatment of *eudaimonia* finds contemplative activity (*theoretike energeia*) to be the highest good. [111] His commendation of *theoria* as godlike may mean that he has in mind the participation of the highest part of the human soul in God's - the Prime Mover's - self-contemplation. This suggests a parallel, not with anything Buddhist, but rather with the Vedantic tradition. The following, from the *Eudemian Ethics*, seems to sum it up:

> The man who lived painlessly and pure of injustice or
> else engaged in some divine contemplation was really,
> as far as a man may be, blessed.

Aristotle attributes the reflection to Anaxagoras but seems to adopt it. [112] What is striking in these words, from a Buddhist perspective, is their aptness for translation and incorporation into the Buddhist record. The understanding of 'blessedness' is no different, and 'divine contemplation' might be rendered *brahmaṃ vihāraṃ*. This would not exactly catch Aristotle's meaning, but it is broadly concordant with it.

As for the points of difference in content, I have already hinted at these. The precepts can be given a positive form and presented as virtues. So presented, and as a whole, they seem to be nothing with which Aristotle would have quarrelled. At the same time they are noticeably without the assertiveness and self-aggrandisement, with a touch of

[111] ARISTOTLE(3)1177a
[112] ARISTOTLE(2)1215b

swagger, which characterise his own examples. As they appear to be just that - examples - it is hardly a point against Aristotle to say that to some degree they reflect their place and time and the characteristics of one sex. The Buddhist virtues, in contrast, may be found to be ‘human’, a reflection of the claim that the diagnosis of the *āryasatyāni* is of the human condition.

Both schemes have it that there is a strong correlation between the virtues, in the one case, or the skilful following of the *marga*, in the other, and wellbeing, prosperity and happiness. In each case this is assumed, rather than argued, and not unreasonably, as such an association seems to be implicit in the notions of virtue and skilful action which are employed. Both schemes are therefore open to the objection that happiness is not simply a question of being a certain kind of person. Rather, misfortune may strike arbitrarily and undeservedly. [113] Aristotle accepts this, saving his position by drawing an obvious and persuasive distinction: the good man cannot be miserable, though he may not be blessed with good fortune. [114] This defence works also on the Buddhist side, where it receives reinforcement. The *karman* doctrine has it that, in the long run, virtue and well-being will coincide. It follows from this that disaster in the present is likely to be the ‘fruiting’ of old *karman*, on which presumption it is not unjust or even surprising. This explanation, it hardly needs saying, depends for its full force on the supposition of a series of lives.

The *karman*-notion, at least in its bearing on a single life, can be brought to bear against a point made by Bernard Williams in discussing Aristotle’s way with people ‘in a bad way from the ethical point of view’.[115] Such a person, perhaps the victim of a bad upbringing - a good one being of prime importance in Aristotle’s scheme - may be able to use reason to pursue his bad purposes. How then, after such an upbringing, is it in his interest to be other than he is? Williams also points to the more alarming case, ‘horrible enough and not miserable at all but, by an ethological standard of the bright eye and the gleaming coat, dangerously flourishing’.

The operation of *karma*n brings it about that the state of mind of someone of this kind is as ‘horrible’ as his actions. To quote the first line of the opening verse of the

[113] In another tradition, the ground of Job’s complaint.
[114] ARISTOTLE(3) 1100b
[115] WILLIAMS B.(2) Ch.3

Dharmapāda, in its Pali form: *Manopubbaṅgamā dhammā manoseṭṭhā manomayā* (entities/ states have mind-going-before-them; mind is chief; they are made of mind). What is true of thought is true all the more of action, if only because action seems to require an intensity of thought. What this means is that the consequence of a life of crime is a state of mind characterised by the vigorous burning of the 'three fires'; put otherwise, it is grounded in the three *akuśala* roots. There may be an excited energy in that - what people register and react to - but no contentment. To quote the third line of the same verse: *Tato naṃ dukkhamanveti cakkaṃ 'va vahato padaṃ* (*Dukkha* follows that man as the wheel follows the foot of the (draught-animal) pulling (it)). The claim is one of inevitable connection, with an implicit denial of Williams' judgment, that he is 'not miserable at all'.

18. Virtue ethics: its contemporary development

Virtue ethics has had a strong revival in the late 20th Century. An influential article by Elizabeth Anscombe gave an impetus to this revival, which has been carried forward by Philippa Foot. MacIntyre and Bernard Williams have had a more distant and critical relation to its development. There has recently been a general exposition by Rosalind Hursthouse. In 2005, a book on environmental ethics by Cooper and James presented the Buddhist scheme specifically as a case of virtue ethics. I am indebted to all these writers, especially to Foot and Hursthouse. [116]

Hursthouse presents three defining features of the form of virtue ethics she wishes to defend, all plainly Aristotelian. One is the centrality of *eudaemonia*, which she prefers to translate as 'flourishing' or 'well-being'. [117] Another is the claim that it is constituted by the virtues. A third is that the virtues are to the advantage of their possessor, by which is meant both that the virtues benefit their possessor and that they make that possessor good qua human being. The congeniality of this to what the Buddhist advocate will wish to claim should be evident from what I have already said. The Buddhist claim is that the qualities implicit in the precepts and laid out in the *Mettāsutta* and in many other similar passages in the early texts will, benefit the practitioner. This

[116] See ANSCOMBE, MACINTYRE, FOOT, HURSTHOUSE(2), and COOPER & JAMES. In referring to B Williams, I have had in mind his publications over a long period.
[117] HURSTHOUSE(2) p.10.

may be a matter of plain observation and can safely be assumed to be the case by way of the operation of *karman*. They will constitute his flourishing, as a general rule here and now, and certainly in the long run. [118]

The successful assertion of this form of virtue ethics should be a support for the Buddhist ethical scheme, if only by way of acclimatising it. I have already suggested that success seems to depend, in part, on the dispensability of an important part of Aristotle's underpinning, or else its effective restatement. This was the presumption that the *telos* of a man or woman is determined by his or her biological characterisation. How far this is possible has been the subject of debate. Among contemporary writers, Foot is unusually bold in urging the possibility of a natural goodness of human beings to be found on a continuum with that of plants and animals. She proceeds to bring out the speciality of the human manifestation. Here is a form of virtue ethical theory notably close to Aristotle's, though Foot makes little mention of Aristotle. Much of the latter part of Hursthouse's book is concerned with the same subject. [119] She develops her position in large part by way of running argument with Williams, whose views on the point were far from constant. It would be interesting to follow this debate, but of little relevance to my prime concerns. What does bear on these concerns is a peculiarly Buddhist understanding of what it is to be human, of which I must now give some account. It cannot be said to be four-square with Aristotle's position or directly applicable to its support, but it offers Buddhists (at least) ground for disregarding the common criticism of Aristotle.

This takes us to the Buddhist cosmological scheme. The plane of human life is one of the five (sometimes six) planes within *saṃsāra*. On the traditional view, two planes are counted 'good', the human and the heavenly, and three 'bad', those of animals and of pining ghosts, and the hellish. All living things have their existence on one of these five and on one of them, which might not be the present one, they will be reborn. [120] This is best seen, and is widely found, in traditional Buddhist art, where the planes are

[118] It will be observed that this account of the claim does not present it as being one that the virtues lead to Nirvana. The virtues certainly lead to rebirth in heaven and, as the *Mettāsutta* states, to the experience of heaven in the present life. See p.46 above.
[119] She presents a subtle qualification of Aristotle's presumptions in her Chapter 10. See HURSTHOUSE (2).
[120] I deal with rebirth in Chapter Four and in concluding.

commonly shown as segments of a disc in the grip of Mara (death), depicted as a demon. What is so conveyed is the ubiquity of death in *saṃsāra*. At the centre of the disc are three animals: a pig, a cock and a snake. These symbolise the three 'bad' roots (*akuśala mulāni*) – otherwise 'the three fires' - and also, here, the three 'bad' planes. The human plane is to be regarded as the best and most favourable, even though it lacks the bliss, if impermanent, which is characteristic of the heavenly. It is almost always on the human plane that Nirvana is realised, however rarely. [121]

The humanity of the denizens of the human realm has a teleological characterisation. To be human is to have the potential for enlightenment. What is open immediately to human beings – thanks to at least some 'good' *karman* - is life in accordance with the *marga*. This will issue in the fullest well-being, both in the present life and later. Humanity is to be defined, in part, by way of its distinction and separation from pig, cock and snake. In their two-sided symbolism, it is these that promise not only a dire fate but also a loss of humanity. If in the course of my human life – human, at least, in its bodily location – I slip into the way of 'living like a pig', or if I am taken over by hatred or rage, I cease, if only momentarily, to be human. The same is true of the corresponding 'good' states; the *Mettāsutta* speaks of 'the godlike/heavenly state (*brahman vihāram*) here'. [122] Realisation here and now of this and similar states is the object of a familiar meditation-practice, of which I will have more to say below.

Here is the Buddhist contribution to the resolution of a difficulty. It may serve as at least a partial response to the charge that the evolutionary understanding of human life cuts decisively against any understanding in teleological terms. Though it is a response fully available only to Buddhists, others may find it suggestive and so helpful, albeit they will find its cosmological frame fanciful. It should allow Buddhists to lean on Aristotle, if they wish to, with greater confidence.

[121] What came to be pictured is set out in the early texts in accounts of the variety of future destinies. For instance, MN 4 [23].
[122] Page 46 above

19. The complexities of virtue ethics

I am not asserting that there is nothing in the sources to support characterisations of the Buddhist scheme as something other than 'virtue ethics'. Various positions are arguable, and argument may itself be helpful and suggestive. Support for one such alternative comes very early in the Pali *Dhammapāda*, probably the most widely read of all the sources. There we find, literally: 'Not by means of hatred do hatreds ever cease here; they cease by the opposite-of-hatred: this is endless law'.[123] How are we to understand the words I have translated 'endless'(*sanantana*) and 'law'(*dhamma*)? The reference of *dhamma* must be at least in part to *karman*, but the word's employment here has a solemn smack to it which might support characterisations of Buddhist ethics in terms of 'Moral Law'. There are not a few such passages. The same breadth of view extends to the practitioner. I know of nothing in the texts to suggest that he need exclude other lines of moral reflection, even those of remote provenance. In considering obstinate cases and dilemmas, the Buddhist practitioner may come to appreciate the fresh perspective offered by other lines of reflection.

This freedom seems to be available to proponents of any school of virtue ethics. Hursthouse discusses cases where action seems required, where it is not at all clear what to do. She considers the virtuous agent, concerned to do the best thing, who may find himself, in the absence of any alternative, driven to do something which, on some 'objective' understanding, must be bad. She concludes that such an agent cannot be held to act as an unvirtuous agent even if he does what might be characteristic of one. [124] The Buddhist tradition offers a problematic case of a comparable kind, one in which the action is virtuous in a way that calls virtue into question. It concerns Prince Visvantara/Vessantara - that is, the Buddha in his penultimate previous birth. His life is happy and glorious: so much is assured by the piling up of propitious *karman*. Visvantara is famous for his generosity, which goes beyond his own resources to giving away the contents of the public treasury. Finally, by way of ultimate sacrifice, it extends to giving away his wife and children, on mere request and to their great anguish. In so doing, does he act as he should? Collins has dealt at length with this dilemma. With much persuasive force he presents it as one of the simultaneous operation of two ideals.

[123] Dhp 1.5.
[124] HURSTHOUSE(1) p.65 and HURSTHOUSE (2) Ch.3 *passim.*

The central figure's position is one of tragic anguish, on account of the impossibility of acting indubitably rightly. The centrality of the story in the literature of traditional Buddhism must be attributable to this. [125]

The problem brought up by the case of Visvantara/Vessantara should not be diminished by murmurs of 'historical relativity'. It suggests that there are problems in moral choice to which the virtue ethical tradition provides no answer. In this respect, it may be urged, the tradition compares unfavourably with others. The categorical imperative and the Benthamite calculus are so set up as to provide answers, even if we are too obtuse to see them. The Buddhist virtue ethicist will hold that someone enlightened or close to enlightenment will see what is to be done through insight. [126] This will be of limited help to most of us. Hursthouse offers a different response, for which Buddhists may be grateful:

> … virtue ethics …. is well positioned … to admit not merely the possibility but the liklihood of there being, as Wiggins puts it, 'some absolutely undecidable questions – e.g. cases where the situation is so appalling or the choices so gruesome that nothing could count as the reasonable practical answer'. …
> …. Virtue ethics …. can appeal to the very fact mentioned above, namely that 'persons of good moral character are often the first to recognise that they do not know what ought to be done'.[127]

I find this persuasive in its suggestion that an apparent weakness in ethical theory is, rather, a strength, in its amounting to a recognition of the facts of the matter.

What has to be stressed is the need for balance. We should appreciate both the strengths of the virtue ethical tradition and the need, from time to time, to look outside it. The Buddhist proponent, I have urged, will be content with both these emphases.

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[125] COLLINS (2) Ch. 7,

[126] I refer to the *dassana* (instrumental case, *dassanena*) mentioned in the *Mettāsutta.* See p.46.

[127] HURSTHOUSE(1) p.62.

Some passing remarks by Hursthouse on the subject of vegetarianism betray a striking attachment to the school of thought for which she argues, even where recourse to an alternative might have been helpful. She writes:

> … most of 'us' – that is, people in the circumstances that make it possible for them to write or read this sort of book – act as we should when we refuse to eat meat …. And I [incline to that view] on the grounds that (i) temperance (with respect to the pleasures of food) is a virtue, and (ii) that for most of 'us', eating meat is intemperate (greedy, self-indulgent). And ethical naturalism bears primarily on (i), not on (ii).[128]

This merits the riposte that it misses the main point. At least in the first place, the debate over eating animals should be one about animals. It should be concerned with the claims to consideration (if any) of animals and with what 'proper' treatment of them requires. Hursthouse's exclusive concern with the agent – with the agent's moral honing of himself - subordinates what should come first. At least at such points as this, the form of virtue ethics which she commends seems open to the charge of excessive self-concern. I by no means grant that the Buddhist form is open to this charge. A Buddhist may bring to bear wider considerations, such as those I have mentioned, while holding in mind the relevant claims of a moderate asceticism, the object of Hursthouse's concern.

20. Moral incapacity

Progress along the Path is a matter of so training and disciplining the feelings and will that certain actions, *akuśala* in kind, become unthinkable and unperformable. [129] This strict incapacity is well caught in a passage from the Pali *Aṅguttara Nikāya*. The Buddha declares that a monk who is an arahant

[128] HURSTHOUSE(2) p.227.
[129] Bernard Williams has discussed moral incapacity. See WILLIAMS (3)

> ……. is incapable of transgression in regard to nine things: he is incapable of intentionally destroying life, of committing theft, of engaging in the sexual act, of telling a deliberate lie … [and so on]. [130]

An arahant is one who has realised Nirvana in the present life, in other words one who is perfected, in that respect an equal to a Buddha. The incapacities ascribed to him correspond to prohibitions in the precept-list and to the 'three fires'. For an arahant, incapacity in these respects is total. It need not be supposed that it will be much less than total in the case of those close to the state of an arahant, or that it will not be at least significant in others. The practitioner is on a path, and incapacity of the kind described is a matter of degree; however much less than total, it is a mark of progress along the path. The realisation of incapacity is close to the sense of shame, and the two may be experienced together. Such an expression as 'I couldn't do that' may catch both reactions. The sense of shame is recognised and valued in the Buddhist tradition. *Hiri* and *ottappa*, usually translated from Pali as 'shame' and '(moral) dread', are held to be decidedly *kuśala*.

I am picking up a hint from Williams' treatment of the subject in taking the words 'moral incapacity' literally, and not merely as an indication of actions of a kind to be off an agent's 'moral map'. Aldous Huxley once remarked that, in the course of aerial warfare, a civilised young man could be got to drop fire on babies when, back on the ground, he would be incapable – strictly – of throwing a baby on to a fire.[131] Huxley's example may have little to it beyond shock-effect, but he is surely right in crediting the inability to throw the child. This instance brings out what moral incapacity is. A survey of other religious traditions might show that the notion is widely found. One striking instance is to be found in the *De Civitate Dei*, where St Augustine treats of the state of the blessed in Heaven. They will be incapable of sin: 'he who partakes of God's nature receives the impossibility of sinning as a gift from God'. He continues: 'Free will was

[130] AN IX 7 [370] *Abhabbo sonavaṭhānāni ajjhācaritum …. Abhabbo … sañcicca pānaṃ jīvitā voreptum … adinnaṃ theyyasaṅkhātaṃ ādatuṃ … metthunaṃ dhammaṃ patisevitum .. sampajānamusā bhāsitum.*

[131] I rely on memory for this reference, which I have been unable to trace.

given first, with the ability not to sin; and the last gift was the inability to sin'.[132] These words enjoy the salience of their place in Augustine's culminating chapter. Bating the specifically Christian expression, the Buddhist can concur with this, adding only that, for those at the end of the Path, Heaven is realised in the living body.

All this calls for treatment at greater length. I grant that an ethical scheme in which moral incapacity enjoys esteem – where it is a mark of progress along the Path - will be one in which concern for consequences cannot be over-riding. This lays its acceptance open to challenge. The advocate of some form of consequentialism might claim that it is possible to be too sensitive – at least, that it should not be assumed without question that growth in sensitivity is admirable.[133] At what point does sensitivity become squeamishness? Why should this squeamishness, or - more kindly - moral fastidiousness, be allowed to over-ride the concern for others which requires an appraisal of consequences?

If space permitted, I would give some account of the thoroughly Buddhist notion of 'skill-in-means' (*upāya kausalya*). [134] This notion might well be deployed in support of the consequentialist's riposte, but its admission of degrees and gradations of practice seems also to support of the Buddhist form of virtue ethics. The tyro practitioner need not aim at universal benevolence and will not achieve moral incapacity. (It goes without saying that he should not affect the possession of what he lacks). The progressive following of the Path requires the highest standard only at the proper time.

21. How the identity problem is one of Buddhist ethics

[132] *Particeps vero Dei ab illo accipit ut peccare non posit .... Primum liberum arbitrium posse non peccare, novissimum non posse peccare.* AUGUSTINE, Book xxii, ch.30. I have given Bettenson's translation.

[133] In the discussion of ethical dilemmas, moral incapacity may be brought up as a way of ending debate. Killing, and so soldiering, is as plainly ruled out by a taking of the precepts as anything could be. Here is a dilemma, both for the young man who has had his call-up papers and for the religious teachers to whom he may turn for advice. It might be urged that for someone well along the path there will be no dilemma as such a person will be incapable of homicide. Here is a solution – of a kind. Harvey discusses obligatory soldiering: HARVEY(2), Chapter 6.

[134] For a full treatment of this, see PYE (1). The notion, in its fully developed form, belongs to the Mahayana, and so falls outside the field of the present argument.

It should now be apparent why I am taking a problem of plainly metaphysical character to be – whatever else it may be - one of Buddhist ethics. It is because of the problem's bearing on choice, conduct and expectation. The significance of this should be manifest. For all that, the impact of the problem is less than total.

One reason for this is that the Buddhist scheme is one of virtue ethics. The practitioner will have something to sustain his position, even if the identity problem should be found obdurate. Someone with an ethical stance of this kind may be supposed to become a Buddhist, in the sense of adopting a Buddhist standard of values, while sitting light to Buddhist metaphysics. Such a person might take the three refuges and accept the five precepts as a guide to living; he might modify his conduct to a degree that would be noticeable, for instance in eschewing violence. The change would be one of the content of his moral practice, not one of its structure. The same position might be achieved by someone with a different starting-point, who - in moving towards a Buddhist position - might pick up for the first time something of the presumptions of virtue ethics. Such, observation suggests, is the position of many Western practitioners. It may be held with a high degree of awareness or with none. If this is so, we need wonder no longer why the identity problem brings about no more discomfort.

Another is that the problem has no bearing on what I have considered under the heads of revaluation and the worship of the Buddha. Taken together, these two strands provide a basis for practice. We can make out a form of devotional Buddhism, which is in no way inauthentic. The two strands are interdependent, and it is only by virtue of this that they are not incompatible. The revaluation of traditional religion might, otherwise, have been no more than an expression of 'anti-religion' – that is, of opposition to traditional practice. The worship of the Buddha restores, in another mode, the devotion which 'anti-religion' alone would have ruled out. Taken together, they make of Buddhist profession something to which I know no equivalent. Here is a mode of practice which seems to be that of very many practitioners in traditionally Buddhist countries.[135]

The problem is to be found within the third strand of those which I picked out for discussion. What I described was the exercise of *Śīla/sila*, both through the self-restraint

[135] The 'anthropological' commentators on whom I have remarked above all leave this impression. See p.30 above.

of the precept-list and through the application of the good qualities recommended by the *Mettāsutta* and other sources . This exercise offers release from the woes of *saṃsāra*: first, a good life here and now; next, a good rebirth; finally, the realisation of Nirvana. This view of the proper goal of practice seems to require an assurance of the persistence of the entity subject to training, throughout life (naturally) and through death into an inevitable sequence of lives.

What is needed is a decidedly strong presumption of personal persistence, which however has to coexist with quite another view. This is the 'weak' view, of reductionist character, on which the tradition seems to lay much emphasis. I will consider this in more detail in the next chapter, but must say now that it seems quite subversive of that presumption. Here is the problem. I hope for a good rebirth, but for the good rebirth of what? How can I, as I conceive myself now, be so concerned for this rebirth that this concern becomes a motivating factor? What of the frame in which these questions arise?

The consequences for morality are, I claim, of such importance as to make the problem central to the Buddhist ethical scheme. My account of it here must remain preliminary, as it needs to be supplemented by the clarifications and by the further consideration of *karman* and rebirth which I will offer in the next two chapters. Even without this, I believe that the problem stands out.

CHAPTER THREE

Clarifications

22. The grammar and semanics of *ātman* and *anātman*

The Sanskrit word *ātman* means, at its simplest and commonest, ‘self’. The Pali equivalent of *ātman*, in the nominative case (as it is usually presented), is *attā*. The negative forms of these words, *anātman* and *anattā*, will normally be rendered ‘(X is) non-self/not self/not-soul’. They may also be used adjectivally, with the inflections of the words qualified - ‘(X is) not characterised by self/soul’, or ‘(X does) not have a self/soul’ - though this is infrequent.[136]

As this will have suggested, the un-negated word *ātman* has several employments. It is used, first, as a reflexive pronoun: an example is *ātmānam apaśyat* (he saw himself). This is hardly controversial. Another employment may be called ‘conventional’. In Sanskrit or Pali, as in English, it is everyday practice to refer to ‘your own interests’ – that is, to ‘the interests of yourself’ - employing *ātman* or *attā* in so doing. In translating the *Mettāsutta* above, I rendered the Pali *sukhitattā* as ‘happy in themselves’. Such usage is broadly uncontroversial, though there are instances where its distinction from another, which I will call ‘metaphysical’, may seem fine. This third employment also has a close parallel in English, evident in talk about ‘my soul’ or reflection on ‘the concept of the self’. My concern here will be almost entirely with this last employment, which is commonly taken to be the sole object of the repudiation expressed in the Buddhist insistence on *anātman*.

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[136] Collins discusses this helpfully, quoting from the Pali a statement that brings out the grammatical difference. The words *anattaṃ rūpaṃ anattā rūpan ti yathābhūtaṃ na pajānāti* should be translated ‘he does not understand the selfless (*anattaṃ*) body as it really is – that is, “body is (a) not-self (*anattā*)”’. See COLLINS (1) p.278, n.1 & 3.

23. *Anātman* and the human subject

In marking out the identity problem, I found no need to say anything about *anātman.* It has often been held that an entity's possession of, or identity with, *ātman* would suffice to ensure its identity and perpetuation, and that it is to the Buddhist insistence on *anātman* that we should attribute the problem. While I have no wish to diminish the importance of the *anātman*-doctrine, which I take to be good philosophy, I take this approach to be misconceived. The assertion of *anātman* has a real bearing on the problem without amounting to the problem. It is one which is at the heart of Buddhist metaphysics. *Anātman/anattā* is one of the three concurrent *lakṣaṇāḥ/lakkhaṇā* (marks (of existence)) to which I referred in setting out the *āryasatyāni.* [137] It is declared to be such, in one of the most celebrated formulations of the Pali canon, in the words *sabbe dhammā anattā*. No translation of these words will be uncontentious, and I by no means insist on what I offer: 'All things/entities/conceptions are without-self'.[138] This very general application is of prime importance. On the Buddhist view, all experience - of the self as of everything else - is *anātman/anattā*. It will be with the application to the subject of this declaration that I am now concerned. This calls for some preliminary account of that notion or doctrine of *ātman/attā* of which *anātman/anattā* is the denial, or rebuttal, or ruling-out from consideration.

This can be given only briefly. The subject is highly contentious. What can be said is that the *ātman/attā* notion is to be found in the early Upanisads, especially in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka* and the *Chāndogya*, and may be found elsewhere. [139] Its flavour is caught by the following representative passage from an Upanisad:

> That truly great, unborn *ātman* ..... among the
> breaths/organs .... that which goes within the ether that

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[137] P.38 above

[138] *Sabbe saṅkhārā anniccā, sabbe saṅkhārā dukkhā, sabbe dhammā anattā. Saṅkhārā* (compound elements, formations) is to be distinguished from *dhammā.* This celebrated declaration is widely found. See, for instance, AN III 134 [286]

[139] In the Rig Veda, we find different uses. For instance, Vata, wind personified as a god, is characterised as *ātmā devānāṃ* (the breath of the gods). Elsewhere, in a hymn addressed to Varuna, the guardian of morality, the speaker refers to his body (*tanu*) in the words 'and thus I converse with myself'. It seems hard to render *svayā tanuā* in any other way. See RV X 168 and VII 86. At the time of the Veda, 'self', it seems, could be conveyed without *ātman,* and *ātman* might have a significance other than 'self'.

> is inside the heart ... the controller of all, the lord of all, the ruler of all. [140]

The question is how the notion caught by these words came to be so widely credited, and why the Buddha – apparently - set himself so firmly against it. Gombrich's summary of the relevant Upanisadic teaching in his Jordan Lectures of 1994 may be quoted in full.[141] In all essentials, it is consistent with the much fuller account to be found in Collins. It is prefaced by the judgment that it is a 'well-known fact' that the central teachings of the Buddha were a response to the teachings of the old Upanisads. The summary goes:

> (1) Man is reborn according to the quality of his works (*karman*). 'Works' refers to following ritual prescriptions. The typical *karman* is a sacrifice; this is normally positive. Violating a ritual norm is negative. Each such act has a given, finite result, positive or negative: a purifying act will be rewarded, a bad/polluting act punished. The most important forms of such reward and punishment are long-term: rebirth in higher or lower forms of life. Such higher and lower forms are on earth and in heaven(s) and hell(s), but all are temporary.
>
> (2) The only escape from this cycle of rebirth is by gnosis of a hidden truth, *brahman*, which is the esoteric meaning of the sacred texts (the Vedas). That truth is to be realised=understood during life, and this will lead to its being realised=made real at death. He who understands *brahman* will become *brahman*. In a less sophisticated form of this doctrine, *brahman* is personified, and the gnostic at death joins Brahman somewhere above the highest heaven.

140 *Sa vā esa mahānaja ātmā ... prāneṣu ya eṣo 'ntarhṛydaya ākāsastammicchete, sarvasya vasī sarvasyeśanaḥ sarvasādhipatiḥ.* (*Bṛhadāranyaka Upanisad* IV iv.22).
141 Gombrich(2) pp.3 & 4.

> (3) The truth to be realised is about the nature of reality. The microcosm (man) mirrors the macrocosm(the universe). Both have an essence, a true nature, a 'self' (*ātman*), which is the same for both. So at the cosmic level *brahman* and *ātman* are to be understood as synonyms.
>
> (4) Being an essence, that *ātman* is unchanging: it is being as opposed to becoming ....

In all this, Gombrich expresses the scholarly consensus. It has not been unchallenged. Dr Paul Horsch has contended that there is too little evidence for the claim that the Buddha's teaching was by way of reaction to a strand within the Upanisads, and that this teaching was, at least as much, a criticism of other traditions. [142] Horsch calls into question Buddhist awareness of the *brahman/ātman* identification, taking the object of the Buddha's repudiation to be a spiritual substance distinct from what makes up the human subject, the *skandhāḥ*. Relying in particular on the Pali *Anattalakkhaṇasutta*, he sees this *ātman* as being a substantial soul, that of an individual, not to be identified ontologically with *brahman*.[143]

How far should traditions other than the Upanisadic be taken to be the target of the Buddha's criticism? The evidence here is uncertain. There may well have been an embryonic form of *Sāṃkhya* before the full exposition of its characteristic doctrines in the – much later - *Sāṃkhyakārikā*, with their sharp distinction of *puruṣa* (soul) and *prakṛti* (nature). The 'Jains' (in modern parlance) were certainly familiar to the Buddha, as the founder of the Jain tradition is presented in the early texts as an opponent. Here, the difficulty lies in determining what notion of the soul was current among the Jains at the time the Buddha taught *anātman*. Was this of an immortal and transmigrating part, which had *karman*, the fruit of action, attached to it as an encumbrance, with the potential for liberation? This seems so much of the essence of the later, articulated,

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[142] HORSCH. So far as I know, this paper has not been answered, except in so far as Gombrich's continuing publications have served as an answer.
[143] For the *Anattalakkhaṇasutta*, see section 24 below.

doctrine that it may reasonably be supposed to be original. [144] It therefore seems not unlikely that the Buddhist notion of *anātman* is a criticism of Jaina and, perhaps, early *Sāṃkhya* notions as well as of the Brahmanical notions with which it is commonly contrasted. In his Numata lectures, delivered in 2006 and not (I think) yet published, Gombrich is notably more willing to grant this, giving equal stress to the Buddha's response to the Jains. What is evident is the patchiness of evidence and uncertainty of chronology. If the *anātman*-doctrine owes its presentation in the texts to the requirements of polemic, and if it is uncertain what notions were its targets, it is unsurprising that it should not be easy to bring it into focus.

24. How the *anātman*-doctrine is conveyed

It will help if I set out what the *anātman/anattā*-doctrine amounts to, as we find it presented in the early Pali texts. For this, I draw on these texts as a whole and, in particular, on the *Khandhasaṃyutta*, in Part III (the *Khandhavagga*) of the *Saṃyutta Nikāya*, with especial regard to the *Anattalakkhaṇasutta*. This celebrated text, which is found also in the Pali Vinaya, is held by Buddhist tradition to be the Buddha's second sermon.[145] This prime position gives it unusual emphasis.

The presentation of *anātman/anattā* comes in the context of a firm disparagement of speculation. Attachment to 'view' – as *dṛṣṭi/diṭṭhi* may be rendered – along with all attachments, should be avoided. We find a refusal on the Buddha's part to make pronouncements on points of debate, on the grounds that his questioner would be misled if he did. Where the debate is about continuity through death, this may take the form of ruling out, if only by silence, both 'eternalism' and 'annihilationism' (as they have come to be called) – that is, both 'going on' and 'stopping at death [146]'. What this comes to is

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[144] The 'soul' of the Jains is usually *jīva,* the term employed in the Buddhist tradition, and elsewhere, to denote the life-force, that which makes a living thing alive. One early Jain text, the Prakrit *Acaraṅga,* uses *aya,* cognate with *ātman,* for 'soul'. The Jaina tradition is recorded in works in Prakrit, which are hard to date, and in later works in Sanskrit. The *Tattvārthasūtra,* by Umasvati, is a polished account of a coherent doctrine. For details, see Bibliography.
[145] See [66-69]; pp.901/03 of translation.
[146] An example of this is the Buddha's abstention from giving the 'wanderer', Vacchagotta, an answer. Vacchagotta is more than once shown to be rebuffed, for his own good, in this way. SN IV [400/01]; translation p.1393.

well summed-up by Priestley: 'What the Buddha offers is not so much a theory of non-self as a non-theory about self'. [147]

The polemical force of what the Buddha offers is registered through various forms of insistance. One of these is the repudiation of *asmimāna*. Sanskrit *asmi* is 'I am', and *asmimāna* may be translated 'I-am-conception' or as 'ego-conceit', so catching both senses of 'conceit'.[148] Here is a strong homiletic stress on the dangers and fatuity of 'self'-creation. Its burden is that *asmimāna* is nonsensical, and so harmful to anyone given to it. [149] On at least one occasion, the Buddha seems to suggest that this insistence is what his whole teaching, the Dharma, amounts to.[150] He presents it as being a matter for self-training (*sikkhitabbaḥ*), with a resolution that within the conscious (*saviññānaka*) body there will be no construction of 'I' or 'mine' or 'self-conceit' (*ahiṅkāramamiṅkāramānānusayā*).

Another such insistence is by way of repudiation of the *ātman*-notion suggested by the words from the Upanisad quoted above. These will have conveyed the extra-mundane and controlling quality of *ātman* 'embedded' in the individual. The postulate is one of an immortal part, held to be identical with the conditioned, ephemeral existence of the subject, or in some intimate, if barely definable, relation with the subject. The summary quoted from Gombrich will have put this into context. The Buddha's riposte, as we find it expressed, is to point to the ubiquity of the other two *lakṣaṇāḥ* (unsatisfactoriness and impermanence) and to their incompatibility with such a notion of *ātman*. It is also to point out the practical powerlessness of any supposedly controlling entity. [151]

A different emphasis is found in the repeated claim that no bodily or non-bodily part of the human subject is *ātman*: there should be no attachment to any part and no illusion of its permanence. [152] Here, the stress is on universal conditioning, such as to rule out the possibility of permanence. I touched on this in Chapter One. In its application to the

[147] PRIESTLEY, p 28.
[148] Note 1136 to *Thus Have I Heard*, Walsh's English translation of the *Dīgha Nikāya*.
[149] DN No.34, MN Nos.22 & 62.
[150] AN III 32 [133/34]. Sariputta's plea to the Buddha to teach Dhamma produces this response. This must be because the practice advocated is declared to lead to *cetovimutti* (liberation of mind). It is notable that the Buddha does not expect the practice to be adopted widely: those who know (*aññātāro*) are declared to be hard to find (*dullabhā*).
[151] See the *Anattalakkhaṇasutta* and MN No.35 [228].
[152] Often expressed: see repeated instances in SN IV.

subject, it is what I described as the ‘weak notion’. I suggested then that this should be seen as a ‘bundle-notion’, a phrase suggested by Hume’s account of personal identity. [153] The ‘weak notion’ subsists in the analysis of entities, ‘wholes’, in terms of their parts, with the implication that there is nothing more to be found. The commonest form of this analysis is in terms of five *skandhāḥ*. [154] The importance of this may be seen from its place in the daily chanting of monasteries in the Theravada tradition, in which each of these parts in turn is declared to be *anattā: rupaṃ anattā, vedanā anattā, saññā anattā*, *saṅkhārā anattā, viññānaṃ anattā* (corporeality, feeling. perception/awareness, karmic and other conditioned factors, and consciousness – all *anattā*). Each one is to be understood as a flow of conditioned elements or as a sequence of events, of great complexity and very highly transient. The account is one of process rather than of substance, and of experience – the experience of an individual entity - that gives no ground for an enduring subject. As a presentation, the *skandha*-account is by way of substitution for any such view.

The texts’ account of sensory perception is concordant with this – as is that of mental conception, as the *manas* (mind) is held to be a sense. There are held to be eighteen *dhātavaḥ* (elements), set out as six sets of three. Each set of three consists of an object, a faculty of perception founded on a bodily organ, or on that of conception, and a segment of consciousness. Here, on the Buddhist view, is all that is needed to account for sense-experience. There is no need to postulate some further entity of a kind that ‘owns’ consciousness. Realisation of this undercuts the postulation of *ātman*. In a Pali sutta already referred to, a sick monk is urged to contemplate non-self in this way – that is, in the internal and external sense-bases.[155] This practice, *anattasañña* (perception of non-self), is recommended as a <u>cure</u>.[156] Here we see the practical, and salvic, application implicit in the texts’ expression of the doctrine.

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[153] HUME (1), Bk.I Section 6. The whole section is to the point. I refer in particular to the words, ‘.. I may venture to affirm of the rest of mankind, that they are nothing but a bundle or collection of different perceptions, which succeed each other with an inconceivable rapidity, and are in a perpetual flux and movement.’

[154] The Sanskrit word *skandha* (Pali *(k)khandha*) has the basic meaning of ‘heap’, ‘aggregation’, and the derivative meaning of ‘category’.

[155] ‘So he dwells, contemplating non-self in these six inner-and-outer sense-spheres’ (*Iti imesu chasu ajjhatika-bāhiresu āyatanesu anattānupassī viharati)* AN X 60 [110].

[156] The monk is sick in body, but the suggestion seems to be that it is his delusion that needs therapy.

Anātman is no simple notion. In its application to the human subject, the term covers a complex of positive and negative emphases. The picking out of *asmimāna* as a source of suffering, may be found in other contexts. Other religious traditions have their own ways of presenting egoism as a danger, and it is this common counsel which takes a Buddhist colouring in its pointing to the danger – and nonsense – of self-construction and self-inflation. The other emphases covered by the notion – metaphysical, rather than moral - find no such parallel. They are best seen as differing, yet interconnected, expressions of the peculiarly Buddhist insight that *anātman* pervades all experience.

25. How *anātman* has been seen as the problem

I said in opening that the inherent difficulties of the *anātman*-notion are not exactly those of the identity problem, for all the undoubted interconnection of the two. The identity problem is one of the co-existence of 'weak' and 'strong' notions of the subject, with regard to the consideration of consequences and to motivation. It has to be considered in the context of *karman* and the rebirth-doctrine. It is no simple consequence or concomitant of the assertion of *anātman*, for all that the 'weak' notion is one of several expressions of *anātman.* This distinction of the two has been insufficiently appreciated. In consequence, the problem has been seized in a confused and confusing way.

I give two examples of this. One is to be found in the presumption that rebirth is made problematic by the assertion of *anātman*, as rebirth can only be a process undertaken by the *ātman* or along with the *ātman*. In the Pali passages to which I have just referred, personal persistence is simply presumed, or asserted, without explanation; there is no supporting mention of 'self' or 'soul'. Rebirth is indeed problematic, as I will suggest below, though for reasons unconnected with the *ātman* or its denial. Pye is, I think, correct in setting out a common misapprehension:

> The Buddha taught that there is no such thing
> as a disembodied soul or for that matter a
> soul beyond our ordinarily constituted

> consciousness .... Westerners who read about Buddhism are often puzzled over how it is that people are reborn or reincarnated if there is no invisible soul to move on from one life to the next. [157]

A hint as to how the 'puzzlement' might be removed is to be found in some dismissive remarks from Gombrich. These concur with the present argument in redirecting the focus of concern from *anātman*:

> Whether the Buddha believed in a self is revealed as a pseudo-problem. He certainly believed, above all else in moral agency; and for many people in the rest of the world that would be an adequate definition of the soul.[158]

This judgment is so expressed as to cut usefully through much misunderstanding, and is open to be taken over for my own contention, that *anātman* is not the problem. At the same time, it raises a question over the moral agency: the agency of whom, or of what? It prompts an identification of 'self' and 'soul' which seems unconsidered, while to say that 'the soul' can be defined as 'moral agency' is remarkable. The common view of the soul is one of a spiritual substance or immortal part. What Gombrich has to say is – here - so expressed as to point to a disabling terminological confusion. I will try to dispel this confusion, but will consider first if recent scholarship is able to help us.

26. *Anātman* in recent scholarship

What I quoted from Pye and Gombrich was incidental to broader discussion. Other writers have made the *anātman*-doctrine their prime concern. Steven Collins' book, *Selfless Persons*, provides an exceptionally thorough treatment.[159] This is confined to the Pali transmission of the record, but it draws on the whole of that transmission, from

157 PYE p.48
158 GOMBRICH(2) p.17.
159 COLLINS (1)

the Nikayas to the Abhidhammic systematisation and to the work of Buddhaghosa. The process Collins deals with, in his own words, is that of the 'construction' of Theravada Buddhism over this long period: this is 'finally crystalised … into a schematic religious dogmatism'. [160]

These words bring out the anthropological smack of his approach, which is calculated to show how a complex or structure of beliefs functions in its social setting – that is, to show what it does and with how it 'works'. Collins presents *anātman* as being of the essence of the Buddhist tradition, and so as being vital to its marking-off from others. It is declared to be central to the Buddhist soteriological scheme, and so to be at the heart of the aspirations of the practitioner, at least of the virtuoso practitioner. Collins describes the stress on *anātman* as representing 'a linguistic taboo in technical discourse', and it seems fair to take this judgment to catch his whole argument. [161]

He suggests that the 'taboo' is effective in two spheres. First, it is an especially strong instance of the ruling-out of what the tradition tends anyway to deprecate – that is, metaphysical speculation or 'views'. Second, it is at the heart of practice: the practitioner cuts concern for self out of his frame of reference as delusory or dangerous. As he explains:

> Views of self, then, are not merely castigated because they rest on supposedly untenable intellectual foundations; rather they are conceptual manifestations of desire and attachment.[162]

The emphasis, on Collins' account, is therefore two-fold: there is no reason to postulate *ātman* in the metaphysical sense - in effect there <u>is</u> no *ātman* (here perhaps 'soul) – and, also, one should live <u>as if</u> there were no *ātman* (here perhaps 'self') to serve as a point of reference or concern. This second emphasis is less a metaphysical stance than a matter of orientation within the soteriological sphere. [163] Collins sees *anātman* as the

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160 Op cit p.3
161 Op cit p.77
162 COLLINS(1) p.119
163 Op cit p.183

grounding of the practice of the 'virtuoso' practitioner, in all probability a *bhikkhu*. All this is found to be compatible with the everyday, or 'conventional', use of *anātman*. As Collins says, 'for the ordinary non-specialist Buddhist (that is, of course, the majority) … we might say that the self is not denied – meaning that the words 'self' (*attā*) and 'person' (*purisa/puggala*) can be used without technical qualms'. [164]

Collins conveys a strong impression of the coherence and comprehensiveness of the intellectual structure which he expounds – expounds rather than defends, though his vindication of its coherence comes close to defence. This is done in an impressive way, yet not, I think, so as to carry conviction that reliance on 'linguistic taboo' is enough to dispose of all difficulties.

One example may show this. In the course of discussing *sakkāyadiṭṭhi* (personality-belief; literally, body-belief), an instance of attachment to a 'view, he remarks on 'the sense of an 'I' which is gained from introspection and the fact of physical individuality'. [165] On Collins' account, it follows from the practitioner's acceptance of the *anātman*-notion that this sense and this fact must not be 'converted into' *sakkāyadiṭṭhi*. This may be an accurate expression of the Buddhist understanding, and a good instance of the shutting out of what would normally be admissible. It seems to invite the riposte that we are not concerned with 'conversion': rather, in their conjunction, the fact and the sense referred to are what constitute personal distinctiveness. Will not the strategy of living 'as if' such-and-such is the case be insecurely based if it trusts overmuch to a willed disregard of how things are?

Later on, Collins brings up the question, 'still to be asked', of how the aspirant 'might situate himself in a moral universe'. This might offer 'a more recognisably human face to action and responsibility' than does the Buddhist account. [166] Here, expressed in its own way, is the grounding of our problem. It is a question which will be brought up by any setting-out of the *skandha*-account of the subject. How may a congeries of elements be sufficiently 'centred' to be capable of moral responsibility? Collins' response to this is no more than a restatement of the grounds on which the Buddhist view is held.

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[164] Op cit p.77
[165] COLLINS p.93
[166] Op cit p.182.

Joaquin Perez-Remon's slightly earlier work does not appear in Collins' bibliography.[167] On the face of it, it is a sharply different production, both in method and contention. Its prime claim is that when the early texts are properly understood and taken on their own terms they do not maintain the *anātman/anattā* doctrine as this has been summarised above.[168] The claim is made by way of distinguishing, on the one side, 'relative' or 'qualified' and, on the other, 'absolute' *anattā*. The latter is 'that that simply denies the reality of the self in man'. On Perez-Remon's view, this denial finds no basis in the texts. He grants that 'relative' *anattā* is fully supported by the texts but contends that this notion is not such as to rule out 'the reality of the self'.

This position is defended as follows. The 'relative' notion finds support in the extensive use of the *attā*-notion in what Perez-Remon calls a 'positive' sense. He claims, of the examples he gives, that these are not to be weakened in significance by being dismissed as instances of what I have called the 'conventional' employment of the self-concept. Insofar as this employment is merely conventional, it is not a subject of dispute. What is contentious is Perez-Remon's view that the concept of the *attan* is not to be found employed only at this 'everyday' level: in some instances at least, which are not infrequent, it is accepted in the scheme of salvation. He claims that, in the version to be found in the Nikayas, this scheme admits a moral self. He finds enough in the texts to justify the conclusion that the *attā* of the Nikayas cannot be just 'a conventional term' or 'a merely empirical phenomenon without roots in the deepest layer of man's reality'.[169]

Perez-Remon is well aware that this is not the position to be found stated in the later texts, that of the commentators, which is that of 'absolute *anattā*'. He refers to Buddhaghosa's expression of *anātman* in its application to what he calls 'the metaphysical self'. This seems to entail the denial also of 'the moral self'. His own claim, marked out against this, is that the early texts admit the notion of the self. The root of human ill is the common – almost universal – identification of this self, which must be taken to be non-phenomenal, with phenomena, typically with the *skandāḥ*. As

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[167] PEREZ-REMON

[168] Collins gives some earlier examples of this contention. Among them are Mrs Rhys-Davids (in her later work) and Christmas Humphreys, whose first interest, in theosophy, seems evident in the position he took here. See COLLINS(1) p.7ff. What Perez-Remon now argues for is what there has been a widespread wish to believe.

[169] PEREZ-REMON p.55

he puts it, the source of trouble is 'the moral self working under the wrong notion of its mistaken identity with what is non-self'. [170] By way of argument for this position, he relies, like Gombrich, on the fact of moral agency: no one doubts that this is at the centre of the Buddha's teaching. More contentiously, he argues:

> The reality of the moral agent cannot stand without a corresponding metaphysical substrate. With the denial of the latter, the moral agent is reduced to a merely phenomenal congeries of factors, a mere succession of phenomena, a simple appearance without any abiding identity. This is not reflected in the way of talking of the Nikayas. [171]

Consistently with this, and bearing directly on the identity problem, he continues:

> The Nikayas .... profess the doctrine of retribution in a straightforward way, taking it for granted and not showing any doubt about there being a 'personal continuity' running through successive existences. [172]

He then proceeds to consider the metaphysical self or 'substrate'. Here, the treatment is by way of negation: all the emphasis is on what this self is not. [173] For Perez-Remon, however, this by no means excludes a stress on the reality of the *attā*: '... the pure, independent, absolute, metaphysical self'. [174]

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[170] Op cit p.81
[171] Op cit p.132
[172] PEREZ-REMON p.145
[173] He finds parallels to this treatment, suggesting its justification, in the *Saṃkhyakārikā* and the Yoga Sutras.
[174] PEREZ-REMON, p.175.

It hardly needs saying that this is not an easy position to sustain, still less present polemically. The argument is probably at its strongest when the *ātman/attā* is presented as an indispensable postulate of moral experience:

> The true self is not assumed, it is experienced as a primary datum in the process of salvation ... The process of salvation is ... the process of rejection by the self of what is non-self. The only characteristic of the true self ... is a negative one, that of not being characterised by what is empirical ..

More commonly, it is in the form – reflecting, as Perez-Remon would say, the emphasis of the texts – of plain denial, coupled with the insistence that all positive statement, even that of a kind positively favourable to denial, is misleading and to be avoided. He refers to the *Sabbāsavasutta*, in the *Majhima Nikāya*, by way of enforcing the point that all speculation on the point is damaging, including that issuing in such assertions 'as my self exists' and 'my self does not exist'.[175] This recalls, in seeming to approximate to, Collins' demonstration of – and emphasis on - a 'linguistic taboo', though elsewhere Perez-Remon goes well beyond Collins, notably in discussing Nibbana and its attainment. Towards the end of his discussion, he remarks on the incomprehensibility of those still alive after achieving perfection: their continued existence is not ineffable; it is what is ineffable that we call the self. As for what happens after death,

> If the person was real before entering Nibbana, it continues being real after that, with a reality that has escaped all conditions of existence and becoming, and is therefore incomprehensible for us. [176]

This brings up questions about 'the person' and about what is 'real' which have been left more or less open in what has gone before.

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[175] *atthi me attā* and *n'atthi me attā.* MN No.2 [8]
[176] PEREZ-REMON p.289.

Perez-Remon's reflections bear directly on our problem and, to the extent that his argument is persuasive, will suggest a solution. This might be expressed as follows: there is no problem because there is no shortfall in personal continuity; the 'true' *attā*, not to be confused with anything phenomenal, ensures this continuity.

Exposition is not advocacy, and Perez-Remon may be right in presenting the doctrine of the Nikayas as he does. I leave that question open, in bringing up two obvious objections to it. One is the difficulty of seeing how a super-sensible entity such as Perez-Remon's *attā* could relate to something purely phenomenal. More precisely, how may such an entity be supposed to be able to control the action and so the retribution of action, of the agent of daily experience? By this, I mean the agent open to observation and introspection – that which is caught by the Buddhist presentation of five *skandhāḥ*? Here is a familiar objection. In one form or other, it is likely to apply to all metaphysical schemes admitting a spiritual substance. It is notoriously a problem with Descartes, who is unusual among metaphysicians of this school in appreciating the need for an answer.[177]

The second, not so different from the first, is that Perez-Remon's *attā* is ineffable. This ineffability is slightly qualified in practice - as how could it not be? It is however essential to Perez-Remon's argument that nothing can be said about the *attā*, conceptualisation being a kind of reification. If this is so, there is another obvious objection: how do we tell the difference between such an entity and a nullity – that is, nothing? If there is no way of telling, why should we suppose a difference? At this point, we see a parallel between Perez-Remon's account and that of Collins, from which it seemed at first so sharp a departure. One talks of a linguistic taboo with respect to the self; the other insists on the ineffability of that entity which he finds admissible.

The two writers just considered stand out from the extensive commentary on *anātman/anattā* of the past 30 years. Among other writers, whom I cannot consider at

[177] Descartes suggests that a gland – it seems, the pineal gland - is the point of connection of the two. This will strike most of us as the wrong kind of answer. See the late work *Les Pasions de l'Âme,* translated as *The Passions of the Soul,* especially Articles xxxi and xxxii. DESCARTES, Vol.I, pp.345/46. Parfit discusses the same difficulty in discussing, and disposing of, 'the Cartesian soul'. His disposal of it is applicable to Perez-Remon's suggestion. See PARFIT (3) pp.223/28

any length, I should mention the quite recent work of Sue Hamilton. [178] Her concern is well caught by the sub-title of her first book, 'the constitution of the human being in early Buddhism'. It is developed by way of an extended treatment of the *skandha*-account. The five *skandhāḥ* are not five things but five processes. In her second book, she found 'Buddhist teachings [to be] ... not about whether or not one is or has a self or soul – what one is – but ... about understanding how one works. Any concern with the notion of self-hood ... was to focus on the wrong thing'. [179] This is not the same as Collins' 'linguistic taboo', but it has a complementary emphasis. Hamilton's point is that the question is not one of 'don't speak of it', but rather one of 'it's not important' or 'that is a misdirection of concern'.

This cursory consideration of works which merit a fuller treatment would be inadequate if *anātman* were my main subject. This is not so, and I have not tried to appraise these writers, or to pursue to a conclusion some obvious objections. This is because my account of them should have brought out the distinction between the question of how to understand *anātman* and what I have called the identity problem. This distinction is not absolute, which is why it has been necessary to discuss *anātman* at this length. *Anātman* is of prime importance in the Buddhist scheme of things. What has, I hope, stood out from the discussion above is that it has only an oblique bearing on the place of personal identity in that scheme. This is, I think apparent at least to Collins, who remarks in passing on 'the minimal sense of psychological continuity required for even the shortest sequence of coherent behaviour'.[180] This 'sense of continuity' will come into play as soon as we question how the human subject is to be understood and consider what it is for the subject to be accounted a person.

Collins would, I think, justify his merely incidental treatment of what we would call 'personal identity' with the plea that from the perspective with which he is concerned the sense of continuity is illusory. He would grant that this is not easily conveyed, referring to 'the difficulty of expressing in ordinary language, to ordinary people, the teaching that ordinary language and psychology is based on an illusion'.[181] Only shortly

[178] HAMILTON (1) & (2)
[179] HAMILTON(2), p.115
[180] COLLINS (1). Footnote to p.99.
[181] Op cit p.135. It is tempting to comment on these words, unusually clear-headed and candid by the standard of discussion in this field, that 'difficulty' understates what must be meant, which might be better expressed as 'self-defeating

afterwards, he qualifies his stance with the concession that, even from the Buddhist perspective, the sense of self ‘ is held to be necessarily a phenomenological reality for the unenlightened’. [182] It is in our understanding of this reality, that I locate what I call the identity problem.

27. The terminology of personal identity

All this may have suggested what I take to be the case, which is that it is far from clear how the *anātman*-notion should be understood. The field of the metaphysics of the self is one of unusual difficulty, and perplexity should not be surprising. The difficulty bears on my own concerns, as the *anātman*-notion certainly has a place within our problem. What I have called the ‘weak’ notion of the subject has the expression it has within the sources, in part because of the need to to exclude the *ātman*. *Anātman* is central to the Buddhist scheme of things by virtue of being one of the *lakṣaṇāḥ*. For all this, I maintain that *anātman* does not, in itself, bring about the identity problem. I have already tried to justify this claim, and will now try to do so by way of terminological clarification. I have already touched on the need for this, remarking above on Gombrich’s apparently interchangeable use of ‘self’ and ‘soul’. How we should understand these terms is much to the point, as is our understanding of ‘person’, ‘being’, ‘living thing’, ‘subject’ and other such terms. Such terms are often presented as interchangeable, yet must at other times be taken to be sharply divergent in meaning. Here is a problem, which is made worse by the complexities of translation. Among translators within the field, there is little consensus as to how key terms should be rendered.

With these difficulties in mind, I offer a tabulation of the terms most commonly deployed in the field of personal identity, so as to bring out the range of use. My object is no more than the simplest clarification. The glosses I have added are of the barest. Other ways of mapping the field are easy to envisage. [183] I have kept common currency

enterprise’.

[182] Op cit p.155.

[183] There is a comparable listing-off by Galen Strawson. See STRAWSON G. Strawson writes: ‘I use the expression “the self” freely, as a loose name for all the undeniably real phenomena that lead us to think and talk in terms of the self. This doesn’t rule out the possibility that the best thing to say, in the end, is that there is no such

in mind and attempted to reflect both Indian and Western usage. On this basis, I distinguish:

(1) The Experiencer, or the subject of consciousness. A necessary postulate if the concept of experience is to be admitted, in distinction from that of successive and mixed sensation. Not itself an object of experience.

(2) The Life-Element. The animating factor. That which ensures or expresses the vitality of a living thing, and the absence of which brings about, or marks, or expresses, its decease.

(3) The Person. The subject extended backwards and forwards in time. That which is founded on memory and the continuity of character. That which permits judgments of merit and demerit and an appreciation of development through time. Such notions as personality and character go along with it.

(4) The Soul. A spiritual substance, found in association with the body – perhaps also with the mind - but detachable from it and exempt from the death of the body.

(5) The Soul. As at (4), but also related, absolutely or in degree, through identity of essence, with God.

(6) The Mind. The 'location' of the totality of 'mental' functions and activities. In India, one of the six senses, the others being the five bodily senses.

(7) The Self. The least precise of this set of terms, generally found to be equivalent to (1), (3) and (4) in combination, sometimes synonymous with either (1) (3) or (4) in isolation.

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thing'. Also:'Perhaps the best account of the existence of the self is one that may be given by certain Buddhists. It allows that the self exists, at any given moment, while retaining all the essential Buddhist criticisms of the idea of the self. It gives no reassurance to those who believe in the soul, but it doesn't leave us with nothing.' It is a pity that the 'certain Buddhists' are not further identified. Are they to be taken to be untypical?

(8) The Human Subject. The term I have employed so far, as being the one least likely to go with prejudging matters. The living thing. The psycho-physical complex. Distinguishable from (7) in extending to the body.

The terms I have listed are, I think, common currency in the West. They seem also to catch rather well the usage of the Buddha's time, in that most of them find ready equivalents in Sanskrit and Pali. In Sanskrit, the 'life-element' is *jīva*; the 'person' is *pudgala*; the 'soul', perhaps also the 'self', is *ātman*; the 'mind' is *manas*. In a way that is less clear-cut, the 'experiencer', the 'soul', the 'self', even the 'human subject' may be rendered as *puruṣa*. This appreciable overlap, and the ready translatability of at least some terms, point to a fair degree of conceptual convergence. It makes it possible to offer clarifications and conclusions applicable within both fields. This is however the most that can be claimed. These are not terms with a strict and exclusive meaning, any more than *kuśala/kusala*is such a term. [184]

28. The use of the tabulation and its limits

This tabulation should have a use in clarifying obscure or complex notions. It will sometimes fail to clarify them, which may be enlightening and so, in its way, as useful. I will give one example of failure, Plato's deployment of the notion of the soul, as this presents an interesting parallel to difficulties over the Buddhist account of rebirth with which I will deal below.

It is a commonplace of philosophical history that Plato's notion of the soul is that of a spiritual substance. His employment of it supersedes – or embraces - earlier notions of the soul as either breath or as shadow-body.[185] The difficulty lies in determining how this spiritual substance comes into being and is composed, how it functions, and how it relates to the other conceptualisations or items of the subject's make-up just listed. The argument of the *Meno* seems to be that a boy's soul has carried with it in its move to his present embodiment the mathematical knowledge acquired in an earlier life. But

[184] This may be seen from the Commentary to the *Kathāvatthu*. Expounding the opening question, that of whether the *puggala* is a real and ultimate fact, the Commentary glosses the word as *attā satto jīva*, as if all three – at the same time? - would do as equivalents.

[185] The earliest recorded use of *psuche*, in the Iliad, seems to require the translation 'breath of life' or 'enlivening factor'. The apparent synonym, *thumos*, is what departs when a hero is killed. For instance, the spirit 'left the bones' (*lipe d'ostea*), a moment associated with darkness coming down.

acquired by what? By the soul itself? By the boy's mind or intelligence, if these are distinct from the soul, or by the boy in some guise as a psycho-physical entity in such a way as to permit its onward conveyance? In the *Phaedo*, the soul seems sometimes to carry attributes, sometimes to be good or bad *per se*, as if to be no 'pure' spiritual substance but to be characterised by those attributes. In the myth of Er at the end of the *Republic*, where Plato is frankly presenting a myth, the souls come to be reborn. This is much in line with the common Indian account, though in Plato's version the souls suffer for their sins before, not in, rebirth. The souls are individuated - 'the one who was Ajax, Odysseus', etc - and it is unclear how far they will go on being Ajax and Odysseus in their new incarnations. Plato, one presumes, expects them to be capable of remembering their earlier lives, like Meno's slave - or, at least in part, their earlier experience. Beyond this, will the reborn souls have same characteristics of personality? Will the former Ajax in a new life display a somewhat boneheaded ferocity? For this to be the case, we have to suppose that (4) somehow 'carries' (3) with it into its new incarnation. Without this supposition (4), the pure spiritual substance, seems barely distinguishable from (2), the animating factor. Or it may be that Plato never distinguishes (3) and (4), holding the soul and what I have called the person, and what might also be called the empirical ego, to be one and the same. If so, we may have a case of (7) as listed: everything that is in play apart from the body. Here, the value of the list lies less in clarification, than in exposing the problem of bringing it about.

A useful work by H D Rankin sheds some light on these difficuties. Rankin sums up:

> According to Plato, the individual … is born; he dies and is reborn into the world. He is a different individual *qua soma + psyche,* for his *soma* is a different one at each successive birth and his *psyche* has been altered in some snse by his previous … life. It has in most cases undergone purificatory or punitive experiences in the other world. But the new *soma+ psyche* is not spoken of as if it were an entirely new arrangement. It is in some sense the same individual that was previously alive on earth.

> The *psyche* carries the human individual out of this world and back to it again.

Earlier he has spoken of bad habits being 'adhesive' to *psychai* – that is, not of their nature. Rankin exposes the difficulties, which seem to be radical, but is not as candid as he might be in pointing to the incoherence in which they seem to issue. [186]

If this problem of interpretation were my prime concern, I would stress the development, and so the variability, of Plato' understanding. I would also need to deal with the mythopoeic strain in his presentation and the compatibility of this with the philosophical. This cannot be done here. What is evident is the remarkable difficulty of intelligible soul-talk. What is a soul? How far is the soul-possessor the person of everyday acquaintance, with observable characteristics? Such questions were not confined to India.

29. What does the *anātman*-doctrine deny?

One target of the *anātman*-doctrine is full in view. The *anātman*-doctrine we find in the Buddhist texts, whatever else its object of repudiation or other significance, is directed against the conception of the *ātman/attā/aya/puruṣa* as spiritual substance - that is, against item (4) on our tabulation. Such an entity needs only to be set against the *lakṣaṇāḥ* for its inconceivability on the Buddhist scheme to be evident.

The question is whether the soul-notion is the only target. Has the insistence on *anātman* any bearing on the other elements in my tabulation? The Life-Element, or *jīva*, ((2) on the list), is not prominent in the texts but is found both as a synonym for *ātman*, perhaps in the latter's early significance as 'breath', and as that which makes or marks a living thing's animate status. We see the latter in the Pali *yavajīvam* (as long as life lasts, lifelong) and, from the *Mahāvastu*, *jīvantaka* (living being). [187] I find nothing in the texts to suggest that *anātman* bears by way of rebuttal on the Life-Element, whatever the verbal equivocation. It seems clear also that it does not bear on the Mind

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[186] RANKIN, Ch.7, & pp.130 and 67.
[187] See Dictionaries: EDGERTON; RHYS-DAVIDS & STEDE.

(6), as one of the six senses or modes of apprehension, or on what I have called the Human Subject (8). This is, as it were, the 'animal', the living thing found in daily confrontation. The point of *anātman* here is confined to an assertion of that Subject's soullessness.

As for the other components of my tabulation, the Experiencer (1) stands out as a special case. I had in mind, in particular, Kant's account of the self and of experience, and it is the one instance in my list of a term associated with a single philosopher. It may be that some such notion was a component of the *Sāṃkhya* conception of the *puruṣa*. This has little bearing on our present consideration.

In considering the Person (3), we come to the heart of the identity problem. Problems over personal identity are, I have argued, distinct from those over *anātman,* for all the overlap between them. This should be evident from the summary account just offered of what a person is, which is at (3) on the tabulation. This is hardly obscure, and common experience should confirm its reality. I have made this point already, in discussing Collins, and quoted his admission of 'the minimal sense of psychological continuity' as being something inescapable. Other writers, with their own emphases, have expressed themselves to similar effect. [188] These indications do not, however, amount to the establishment of anything clear-cut. The entity formed by memory and continuity of character is not, in the present context, made out so explicitly as to acquire its own label. The terms in common use - in particular, *pudgala* - seem not to measure up to my definition, though they on doubt catch the notion of the human entity as a particular. *Karman* will figure largely in any specification of the person-notion within the Buddhist field, and an account of its role would catch much of what is pointed to at (3), though not the contribution of memory. I will speak below of 'the karmic entity', employing the term as an imperfect Buddhist expression of 'the person'. What we have, I find, as we look for a fuller expression, is a shadow-notion, always there in any introspective contemplation of what we are and periodically more substantial. I will shortly consider the case of a strain in the Buddhist tradition, the *Pudgalavāda* or 'Person school', which, as we will see, presented a 'person' so far substantiated as to be found to be reified and, it was claimed by opponents, indistinguishable from the *ātman.*

[188] For instance, Harvey: 'There may not be unchanging personal identity, then, but personal continuity is seen as very strong'. HARVEY(1) p.72.

This sense of something imperfectly articulated, yet indispensable as a notion, is not peculiar to the Buddhist tradition, or to India. It is to be found in some surprising places, for instance, in the *De Rerum Natura* of Lucretius. Remote from our concerns as it is, this is worth mentioning for the broader light it sheds. In Lucretius' exposition, the person-conception achieves full definition at the point where the argument requires it. The poet's notion of the 'soul' or 'self' or 'mind' is one of a fine material substance, made up of a non-enduring complex of atoms. Lucretius is concerned to show that death should be of no concern to us, as after it we are nothing. Suppose the atoms that make up the mind should by some chance be reassembled, after death has brought about their dispersal, and that they should come again into the same configuration – would that amount to a remaking of the same being? The answer is No, and the reason is that 'the ability to recollect ourselves (*repetentia nostri*) would have been interrupted'.[189] In other words, the continuity of consciousness would have been lost. The poet's conclusion – as if in anticipation of Locke - seems to be that *repetentia nostri* is indispensable for identity.

Quite as problematic as this is the case of the Self, item (7) on the tabulation. Should the assertion of *anātman* be seen as a rebuttal of the 'self'? The imprecision of this notion also is at the heart of the difficulty. We have seen that Perez-Remon has an answer to it. He postulates a 'true' self, which he finds compatible with *anattā,* because he takes the proper (and original) conception of *anattā* to be limited to what he styles the 'relative' view, which rejects only any identification of the phenomenal with *attan*. I have treated above of obstacles to this understanding, and even to seeing what difference its substantiation might make. To the grounds I have already set out for dissenting from Perez-Remon, I might add one suggested by Collins. On Perez-Remon's understanding there can be only incidentals to differentiate Buddhism from Brahmanical religion.[190] Perez-Remon's 'pure, independent, absolute, metaphysical self' would serve as the Buddhist expression of a strand important within the Brahmanical religion of the Buddha's day and destined to be central to its later Vedantic

[189] *Interrupta semel cum sit repetentia nostri*. *De Rerum Natura* III, 851. I have followed Kenney's translation. He remarks that this is the only use of *repetentia* in ancient literature. The elusiveness of the concept is backed by that of the term.
[190] I do not say that these may not have had their own importance. The disparagement of caste would be one such.

development. We need not follow Collins in all respects to trust that this cannot be right, if only because polemicists on both sides would have concurred. [191]

The best understanding of item (7) on the tabulation has already been suggested by the account of the practical application of the *anātman*-notion which I offered above. I presented this as being one of repudiation of *ātman* understood as 'soul' – and also as having a moral application in its opposition to *asmimāna* – that is, to any construction of self, grasped by way of inchoate apprehension and made an object of attachment. It is the moral application which seems to be called up here. On this understanding, the thrust of *anātman* is against that 'constructed' Self, item (7) on the tabulation, as well as against the Soul, item (4), from which indeed it might hardly have been distinguished. It takes translation from the Sanskrit or Pali to make sharp the distinction of 'soul' and 'self'. I take this to be the limit of its repudiation.

30. Is *anātman* our problem?

My conclusion is that the *anātman*-doctrine is not simple and singular. It is to the simplification of something multi-faceted that we should attribute much of the misundertstanding commonly found. The doctrine is not one of the repudiation of the personal identity and continuity, of which the Buddhist tradition, in its distinctive - and problematic - way, is an affirmation. A common view of the matter is a misunderstanding: the problem is not one of the 'invisible soul' referred to by Pye in the words quoted above. The view caught by the quotation from Gombrich which followed is essentially correct, although it is not enough to point out 'a pseudo-problem'. For clarity, we have needed a terminological precision which distinguishes 'self' and 'soul', and which makes plain their compatibility, or lack of it, with *anātman*. This I have just tried to supply.

[191] The most fully worked-out Brahmanical response must be Udayana's treatise, *On the reality of the ātman*. This was written centuries after our period, and may be seen as a summation. It criticises various expressions of *anātman*-doctrine, as well as making positive assertions. One of these is that perception offers a proof of the reality of the self, all living beings having an assurance of 'I'. See ATMATATTVAVIVEKA, especially p.344.

31. A Buddhist 'Person school'

I must now deal with two other topics where some clarification is required. Here, my purpose will be the limited one of recording the bearing on my argument of some points of contention and of vindicating the view I take of this bearing.

The first of these is the *Pudgalavāda* or 'Person school'. The differences between the 'schools' into which the Buddhist tradition came to be divided were not such as to have made a generalising treatment of the tradition impracticable. The *Pudgalavāda* is the exception. It is plain from the records that there was a long-enduring school - or tradition or doctrinal succession - marked off by its postulation of a *pudgala*. [192] This entity's place and role in the scheme of things was found by its opponents to jar badly with central Buddhist contentions. The 'Person school', now long extinct, has always been controversial.

My own concern is well caught by a passage from an exhaustive study by Priestley, who considers why the *Pudgalavādinaḥ* advanced their characteristic thesis. I quote:

> Without a real self, they believed, the operation of karma would be inexplicable, and the cultivation of benevolence towards other selves and the Buddha's compassion in teaching them would be deluded if not actually meaningless. [193]

This is tantamount to saying - as I have said - that, at least from one standpoint, much of the Buddha's teaching is subverted by insistence on what I have called the 'weak' notion of the person.

The evidence for the *Pudgalavāda* and its contentions is set out clearly by Priestley.[194] It is patchy, elusive and debateable, consisting largely of passing references by contemporary chroniclers and travel-writers, of rebuttals by writers from within the

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[192] *Pudgala/puggala* may be uncontentiously translated 'person', but with the proviso that no conclusion should be anticipated.
[193] PRIESTLEY, p 217. I owe much to Priestley in what follows.
[194] Op cit, ch.3.

Buddhist mainstream (as it now stands out as being), and of surviving texts by adherents. The first category seems to demonstrate no more than the bare existence of a *Pudgalavāda*. Until recently, the second category was almost the sole source of information. It must be a question how far such a mode of presenting it is reliable. Surviving texts are few. Recently, four texts which appear to be in the *Pudgalavāda* tradition have been translated from the Chinese and made available in English paraphrase. [195] Their interpretation is no easy matter, and it is hard to be sure that the doctrines to be drawn from them are compatible with those that can be deduced from the rebuttals. With this caveat, I offer a summary of what it seems possible to call the main theses of the *Pudgalavāda*. The supporting evidence for this is of disparate kinds and it extends over hundreds of years. Its main elements amount, in Pali, to parts of the *Katthavatthu*; in Chinese, to the four surviving texts just referred to; in Sanskrit, to the last chapter – perhaps a distinct composition - of the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*.

32. The *Pudgalavāda*: for and against

The principal *Pudgalāvadin* thesis is that the postulate of a *pudgala* is both well-grounded and necessary. The *pudgala* is neither the same as, nor distinct from, the five *skandhāḥ*. Its reality may be called a 'further fact', to use Parfit's term – that is, further to the fact of the existence of the *skandhāḥ*. It is not a spiritual substance of Upanisadic character, and its recognition is compatible with acceptance of *anātman*. This is because the person is an indispensable point of reference, and because much Buddhist doctrine cannot be made intelligible without such a postulate. Otherwise, what suffers consequences or achieves liberation? What it is must be an entity and a unitary entity. It is in line with this, goes the argument, that the Buddha is regularly recorded as teaching in ways that seem to assume the persistence of human subjects. The subject so persistent seems to need a designation and *pudgala*, with its familiar range of meaning, seems to serve well for that.

It has to be claimed that the postulate adds something, that the *pudgala* is not identical with the *skandhāḥ*. If that were all it was, the postulate would have no point. It has to be

[195] BHIKSHU THICH THIEN CHAU. The Chinese texts must be taken to be translations from Indian originals.

claimed also that it is not distinct, that it is not a spiritual substance in temporary association with the *skandhāḥ*. Such a view would amount to the reassertion of the *ātman*. What has to be claimed will be finely poised. The argument may be extended to involve rebirth - that is, succession from one life to another, as conditioned by *karman*. I have touched on rebirth above in presenting the identity problem: if my interest is to be engaged in the possibility of succession through lives, this succession needs to be, in some way or other, personal. The postulate of a *pudgala* may be one such way. It seems to fit with the celebrated series of lives recorded of the Buddha himself in the Jataka stories, at least on a common and popular understanding of the Jatakas. Other series of lives, far from Buddha-like, can be seen in terms of a *pudgala* led on by craving (*tṛṣṇa/tanhā*).

The most determined opponent of the *Pudgalavāda* would have agreed that we may talk, permissibly, of the *pudgala/puggala*. One of the works making up the Pali Abhidhamma is the *Puggalapaññatti*. This deals with personality-types, employing the term *puggala* in the sense of 'personality', 'character' or 'individuation'. This case is not to the immediate purpose, and I touch on it only to say that these senses seem to derive from the word's basic sense of 'person'. If this is so, those who use the derivative senses cannot afford to be too dismissive of the basic sense. The Abhidhammic use illustrates the difficulty over the meaning of basic terms brought out in the last section, prompting the tabulation offered there.

The main charge against the *Pudgalavāda* is that the postulate of the *pudgala* is in effect a reassertion of the *ātman*. Another is simply that the *Pudgalavāda* is confused and unintelligible. The two charges seem to need to be considered together, as the standard reply to the first, that the *pudgala* is not distinct from the *skandhāḥ*, may seem to be almost a constitution of the second. The orthodox reject the *Pudgalavāda* on the grounds that there is a notional totality of existents in the world, and that further existents cannot just be wished into being. The Buddha's habit, and ours, of using convenient verbal designations, which may be metaphorical, should not lead us to think otherwise. Is the *pudgala* an existent or the component of a metaphor? If the latter, the orthodox can be unconcerned. If the former, it will be a question where it is to be found? How is its existence to be established?[196] These questions recall the style of

[196] For all this, see the opening of the KATHAVATTHU *passim.*

criticism which we have seen used to establish the *anātman*-doctrine. It is to the effect that we need not and should not postulate an entity wherever a complete account of experience may be rendered without it. The *Pudgalavāda* has it that the *pudgala* differs ontologically from the *ātman*. Is it therefore secure against this line of criticism?

In the *Kathāvatthu* the approach is by way of enquiring whether the *pudgala* is asserted to be an entity of the same order as the *skandhāḥ*. The question is asked also of the *āyatanāḥ*, the *dhatavāḥ* and the *indriyāḥ* - that is, of the basic elements, to be found in immediate experience, of the Buddhist account of the subject. [197] As the answer seems to be that it is not of the same order as any of these kinds of component part, it follows that it is not an entity of any sort and, if not a metaphorical expression, then nothing. The assertion that the *pudgala* is neither identical with the *skandhāḥ* nor distinct from them is likewise found to be unintelligible.

Vasubandhu wrote some centuries later in a period of enlarged philosophical sophistication. As well as criticising the *Pudgalavāda*, he presents a positive account. This will have been suggested from the sentences from the opening to the concluding part of the *Abhidharmkośabhāṣya* quoted above. [198] It is to the effect that, when one is faced with another living being, one cognises the substantiality of the *skandhāḥ*, which are substantially real (*dravyasat*). At the same time, one conceives the person, which is real by way of conception (*prajñaptisat*). The conception is just that, a conception, but it is substantially grounded (*dravyasiddha*) – that is, grounded in the *skandhāḥ*. In other words, the person is *dravya* (substantial) in a secondary sense or at one remove. As a conception it is inseparable from the *skandhāḥ*. Vasubandhu suggests that the *Pudgalavādin* writers fall into error through a tendency to inflate or reify this conception. As Duerlinger puts it: ' … Vasubandhu assumes that if we do not possess either substantial reality or substantially established reality we do not exist at all'. [199]

[197] I have touched on the *dhātavaḥ* above (p.75), and might have offered a similar account of the others.
[198] Page 20 above
[199] In a useful commentary to his translation of this part of the *Bhāṣya* (Sec 1.2). See DUERLINGER. Elsewhere in this section, Duerlinger writes: 'According to Vasubandhu, the object of the conception of a person is a conventional reality. A person as a person is not just a collection of aggregates. A person and a collection of aggregates, he believes, are the same in existence, and so, when reference is made to a person, reference is made to a collection of aggregates rather than to a self'. The resemblance of this view of what is involved to Parfit's Reductionism will become clear in Chapter Five.

Is Vasubandhu, at the end of our period, asserting what the 'mainstream' Buddhist tradition would always have asserted? The roots of the tradition in the sutra/sutta literature certainly lack his precision, but this difference does not, I judge, amount to a distinction in what is asserted. Vasubandhu's formulations have the precision typical of developing religious orthodoxy, formed by the concern to shut out the dangerous. This concern must have ruled out any accommodation with a *Pudgalavādin* attachment, as he would have seen it, to a fresh concept – that of the person.

What we are concerned with is, I believe, not so much a *Pudgalavāda* school, of a millennium's duration, as a succession of objections and reconstructions, to be accorded one label and prompted, we can suppose, by the concern summarised by Priestley in the words quoted above. All that can safely be claimed is a family resemblance between assertions more various than is generally recognised. Priestley's impressive account brings out the difficulty – more, perhaps, than he appreciates – of being clear what the *Pudgalavādin* writers were about. My concern here, in this very brief account, has been the narrow one of showing that there existed, over a long period, a 'school', or (I prefer to say) succession, which offered a Buddhist notion of the person which came to be seen as deviant. It is a fair surmise that an impetus behind this offer was an apprehension of the identity problem. In other words, the contentions of the *Pudgalavādin* writers bring out the reality, and recalcitrance, of the problem. To lay bare the likelihood of this has been my object.

33. What the two-truths notion amounts to

The other topic I must address is the two-truths notion, which is often brought up in discussion of the identity problem. The way this is done shows that some clarification is necessary. From the viewpoint of our period, the notion is one with a great future before it, realised in its development within the Mahayana. In the context of its emergence and first expression, it is better understood as a reaction to the identity problem than as an approach to its solution.

The notion is, in brief, that there are two kinds, degrees or levels of truth, where the word 'truth' must be taken to mean 'significant or truth-achieving assertion'. *Satya* (truth) may be, in Sanskrit terms, either *paramārtha* or *saṃvṛti* (in Pali, *paramattha* or *sammuti*). [200] The derivation of *satya* (Pali *sacca*) from *sat*, the present participle of the verbal root *as* (to be), may give warrant for glossing it also as 'reality'. This gloss may on occasion be illuminating. [201] *Paramārtha* and *saṃvṛti* are usually translated, respectively, as 'absolute', and as 'relative' or 'conventional'. Monier-Williams glossed them as "self-evident' (which has not caught on) and as 'by general consent'. [202] These renderings all point the way to what the distinction must be taken to be, but have a Western smack which may be misleading. I will therefore leave the Sanskrit and Pali words untranslated.

Outside the Mahayana, an explicit treatment of the two-truths notion is found only at the end of our period, in the commentarial works. What we find is well summarised in the best-known book of a contemporary *bhikkhu* in the Theravada tradition, the late Walpola Rahula, which has come to be accepted as a classic statement of 'basic' – more precisely, Theravada – Buddhism. He shows there how the doctrine may be applied to the human subject

> .. it should be mentioned here that there are two kinds of truths: conventional truth (*sammuti-sacca*, Skt. *saṃvṛti-satya*) and ultimate truth (*paramattha-sacca,* Skt. *paramārtha-satya*). When we use expressions in our daily life as 'I', 'you', 'being', 'individual', etc., we do not lie because there is no self or being as such, but we speak a truth conforming to the convention of the world. But the ultimate truth is that there is no 'I' or 'being' in reality.

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[200] *Paramārtha* and *paramattha* are clearly forms of the same word. *Saṃvṛti* and *sammuti* are not. Here is a problem. *Saṃvṛti*, from root *vṛ,* means literally 'covered' or 'concealed'. *Sammuti*, from root *man*, means, with its prefix, 'generally thought'. Have we two different views here of the distinction, or is *saṃvṛti* the miscalculated Sanskritisation of a Prakrit term? Edgerton, in his dictionary article, seems to suggest the latter. See EDGERTON.

[201] See BUESCHER *passim*, especially pp.55 to 83.

[202] MONIER-WILLIAMS.

For this account, Rahula can rely on the Abhidhamma writers and the commentators. It is notable that when he needs a philosophically richer statement of the doctrine, Rahula has to turn outside his own tradition, the Theravada, to a Mahayana text:

> As the *Mahāyana-sūtrālaṅkāra* says: 'A person (*pudgala*) should be mentioned as existing only in designation (*prajñapti*) (i.e. conventionally there is a being), but not in reality (or substance *dravya*) [203]

The terminological distinctions employed will recall those of Vasubandhu.

The Mahayana development began within the latter half of our period and continued for centuries. I mention it here, as it is there that we find the notion at its most significant. At this early stage of the development, there is little of the later, often highly scholastic, working-out of the notion. We find, rather, an acceptance of paradox, along with a willingness to live with the problematic. This is well caught by Guy Newland, in a book published in 1992. [204] In a section of his opening chapter, entitled *Internal Contradiction in Buddhism*, Newland quotes Conze. [205] Conze has cited a passage from the Diamond Sutra: 'And yet, although innumerable beings have thus been led to Nirvana, no being at all has been led to Nirvana'. By way of explaining this, Conze explains:

> A Bodhisattva is a being compounded of the two contradictory forces of wisdom and compassion. In his wisdom, he sees no persons; in his compassion he is resolved to save them.

This is an excellent expression of a kind of innocent confusion, produced by the assertion of incompatibles. It seems likely that such confusion, innocent or not, counted

[203] RAHULA p.55
[204] NEWLAND. Newland's bibliography records the extensive work done on the two-truths notion over the past 30 years. Over the same period, much primary material in the Tibetan tradition has been made available and translated.
[205] Op cit. p 15

for much in the formulation of the two-truths notion. The acceptance of paradox may be hard to sustain. The claim that there are two truths must have seemed to offer a way of passing beyond it, whatever the difficulty of sustaining the claim or even making it clear. Very much is found to be claimed for the notion. Nagarjuna makes it fundamental to his presentation:

> Those who do not know the distinction of
> these two truths do not know the deep reality
> in the Buddha's teaching [206]

Later on, and especially in the Tibetan tradition, the notion was to receive more than one form of philosophical substantiation. This further development went beyond the bare assertion that there were two truths, backing up the assertion with the resources of an elaborated logic. To deal with it here would be to go beyond the limits I have proposed.

34. Where 'two truths' are unavailable

There is an instructive contrast with the Christian development. In each case, we can make out the construction of a religious system from the teaching ascribed to a charismatic originator. This construction – we may suppose - will tend to dispose of inconsistencies within the original teaching. Often these will be no more than superficial differences, attributable to the varying circumstances in which the originator spoke. Others may be too deeply rooted for their elimination by way of the 'ironing-out' applied to these simpler cases to be possible. In the Buddhist instance, I take the two-truths notion to have its origin in the need to accommodate their persistence. Its appeal is to be found in its making possible the simultaneous assertion of incompatibles. Such a solution was unavailable to Jews or Christians. There can be no basis for appeal to the co-existence of 'two truths' where the divine inspiration and verbal inerrancy of Scripture – the whole of Scripture - are taken for granted. Problems of inconsistency will be recalcitrant, and other means of resolving them will have to be found. These have often proved insufficient, as is evident from the extent of heresy and schism in

[206] *Ye 'nayor na vijānanti vibhāgaṃ satyayadvayoḥ* । *te tattvaṃ na vijānanti gambhiraṃ buddha-sāsane* ॥ *Mūlamadhyamakaākārikā*, 24.9. Nagajuna is most commonly taken to have lived in the first century AD

Christian history.[207] In seeing this, we may gain some insight into the appeal of the two-truths notion within the Buddhist sphere. Its usefulness for the purpose of minimising contention - or for its evasion - has been considerable.

35. The two-truths notion in the canon and commentaries

There is no plain statement of the two-truths notion in the early texts. The closest approach to one is to be found in declarations ascribed to the Buddha to the effect that language may be inadequate to catch what he has to say. An instance of these is the words addressed to Citta, the son of the elephant-trainer, with which he ends an abstruse explanation of kinds of existence:

> .. these [the terms he has employed] are names, expressions, turns of speech, designations in common use in the world, which the Tathagata uses without misapprehending them. [208]

There is at least one instance where something like the developed notion seems to come into view. The *bhikkhuni* (nun), Vajira, is in dialogue with Mara, the tempter. She challenges him:

> Why now do you assume 'a being'? Mara, is that your speculative view? This is a heap of sheer formations: here is no being found. Just as with an assemblage of parts, the word 'chariot' is used, so, when the aggregates exist, there is the convention, a being.[209]

[207] A case of schism is the break of the Church in England from the Papacy, resulting from Henry VIII's wish for his marriage to be found invalid. The problem here was one of apparently incompatible statements of divine law on the question of marriage to a brother's widow. See Leviticus, xviii, 16 and xx, 21, and Deuteronomy, xxxv, 5. Discussed in SCARISBRICK, Ch. 7.

[208] DN I No.9 [202]. *Imā .... lokasamaññā lokanruttiyo lokavohārā lokapaññattiyo yāhi tathāgato voharati aparāmasanti.*

[209] SN (*Sagāthāvagga*) 297. *Kinnu sattoti paccesi māra diṭṭhigatannu te; suddhasaṅkhārapuñjoyaṃ nayidha sattūpalabbhi. Yathā hi aṅgasambhāra hoti saddo rato iti, evaṃ khandesu santesu hoti sattoti sammuti.*

With a few exceptions such as these, the notion is to be found, not in the primary texts, but in their commentaries. Sometimes the commentaries enlarge on points unlikely to catch the attention of readers of the texts. The fifth sutta in the Pali *Majjhima Nikāya* contains a discussion of the kinds of 'person' (*puggala*) to be found in the world. The commentary on this Nikaya explains this term in a way that seems calculated to guard against *Pudgalavādin* understandings. The two-truth notion receives a full exposition.

The words of Vajira just quoted seem to be taken up in the *Milindapañha*.[210] This is a scholastic work in Pali, of unknown authorship, largely in dialogue. King Milinda, perhaps the historical Menander, is the enquirer. The monk Nagasena brings Socrates to mind in the way he resolves many and varied perplexities. Early in the dialogue comes some interchange over Nagasena's name.[211] Nagasena explains that his name is just that: it is a conventional designation, since no *puggala* (person) is 'got at' (*upalabbhati*). Milinda's reply is the predictable one: designation of what? He proceeds to the questions that arise if he is indeed not faced with a *puggala*: who is it that functions in life? The force of these questions is plainly strong in the context of *karman* and rebirth. Where is the moral agent? Who is that 'guards moral habit' or not? Who 'kills a living being'? The dialogue then shifts into the often-quoted discussion of the chariot. The king declares that he arrived in a chariot. Nagasena asks to be shown this, explaining that he does not mean the pole, the axle, the wheels or any other component. Is there a chariot apart from its components? Receiving the answer No, Nagasena claims that Milinda cannot substantiate his assertion, 'I came by chariot'. He then proceeds to claim that what is true of 'chariot' is true of 'Nagasena': 'according to the highest meaning' (*paramattha*), 'a person is not got at here'. This is found conclusive.

It is not my present purpose to consider the merits of this particular – and celebrated – argument, though I will say that it cannot be decisive.[212] It is, rather, the narrower one of

[210] I take this work to follow the Abhidhamma works, which themselves follow and systematise the Sutta and Vinaya texts, and to precede the work of Buddhaghosa. Dating much more precise than this is problematic.

[211] Miln.I [25] & [27]: translation pp.34/36.

[212] The parts of the chariot are co-ordinated for a purpose, and it runs as a unity. The chariot is, in that respect, comparable to something with animal life. This makes it possible to say that there is an entity distinct, if not apart, from its components. Locke's discussion of identity, with which I deal below, offers the materials for an effective response.

showing the working-out in practice of the two-truths notion. An awareness of the need to solve – or, if not solve, evade - the identity problem seems likely to have prompted the extreme and question-begging position which the writer assigns to Nagasena. The two-truths notion is an element, though imperfectly formed, in this position. One component only of the *paramattha/sammuti* opposition is in place. Nagasena declares that, in the sense of *paramattha*, there is no person to be found. His position is extreme in being notably without the concession to ordinary usage offered by admission of *sammuti sacca*. The starkness of this position may (to speculate) have seemed such as to make this admission necessary. Once it is made, we have the two-truths notion.

I have already brought out the fundamental importance assigned to the notion by Nagarjuna. The declaration I have quoted is vindicated throughout the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*. What may be surprising is the way Nagarjuna's dialectic marks out a sphere for *saṃvṛti satya*. He seems in no doubt that expressions within the sphere of the *saṃvṛti* are intelligible ones. [213] We are told that without this acceptance there could be no pointing out of the *paramārtha*.[214] Such expressions are indeed intelligible only in the qualified sense assigned to them. Newland refers to Stcherbatsky in concluding that this implies a three-fold distinction, one of the two we have been considering and the merely nonsensical. [215] For anyone attached to ordinary usage this is at least an easier position than that offered by the *Milindapañha*.

36. The notion in contemporary polemics

A defence of the notion from a Mahayana perspective is to be found, with much else, in a recent work by Jean-Francois Revel and his son, Matthieu Ricard. [216] It is in dialogue form, the son, a Buddhist monk in the Tibetan tradition, expounding and defending his position against the father. Though this is a book for the mass-market, it is grounded in scholarship on the monk's side and both participants are practised polemicists. [217] I refer to it here, because Ricard's assertions bring out the future

[213] Op cit, especially in parts 8 and 24: for instance, 8.12.
[214] *Vyavahāram anāśritya paramārtho na deśyate*. *Mūlamadhymakakārikā* 24.10.
[215] NEWLAND p.14 and n.14.
[216] REVEL & RICARD. Revel was the author of "Without Marx or Jesus' and 'How Democracies Perish'.
[217] Ricard has come to be taken as a representative Buddhist authority, at least by journalists. See his extended interview in the newspaper, *The Independent on Sunday* (18 February 2007).

development of the two-truths notion. It may stand also, not unfairly, for a common failure of rigour in its confrontation of difficulties. Ricard states:

> As for ultimate reality according to Buddhism ... we'd distinguish two different aspects. The phenomenal world, as we perceive it, belongs to relative truth. The ultimate nature of things, transcending any concept of being or non-being, appearance or cessation, movement or non-movement, one or many, belongs to absolute truth. [218]

This is not quite what Rahula says, as it exposes the Mahayana smack inherent in Ricard's monastic formation. Nonetheless, we find the same distinction.

We also find what I take to be evasions of the identity problem. Further quotation from Ricard will illustrate this. In earlier passages, he criticises:

> ... the perception we have of ourselves as a person, as an 'I' that is an entity existing in itself, autonomously, either in the stream of our thoughts, or in our bodies. But if this self really exists, where is it? [219]

What we find later on seems to have quite different presumptions behind it:

> What's called saṃsāra .. .. is a world of suffering, distraction and confusion. We wander endlessly in it, impelled by the force of our actions, called karma ..... Actions, once they've been carried out, will eventually bring their results and propel us to other states of existence ...we oscillate up and down from one life to the next .....[220]

[218] REVEL & RICARD, p 116/7
[219] REVEL & RICARD p.26
[220] Op cit pp.104/05

What wanders? What is propelled? What oscillates? Obvious as these questions are, Revel, the interrogator, fails to press them. In response, Ricard might have replied that he was using the language of one truth in the sphere of application of the other, having pragmatic grounds for doing so, these being expressible in Buddhist terms as *upāya kausalya* (skill in means). Such a response takes us to the heart of the question, and to discuss it adequately would require much more space than is available. For the immediate purpose, it may serve to point out that Ricard seems to work by way of disposing of the identity problem without answering it. It must be a real question whether or not I will wander, be propelled, or oscillate 'from one life to the next'. If I am seized of the reality of this possibility, it may govern the direction of my life. To use a phrase employed by Parfit in a similar context, it seems to be 'what matters'.

37. Two truths?

Contemporary polemicists who deploy a two-truths notion have adequate warrant in the commentarial and philosophical texts for doing so, even though the notion has little explicit grounding in the early texts. What we find in the early texts are accounts of personal continuity which are, I maintain, problematic, and the occasion of the problem of my concern. I have suggested that it is the recognition of the identity problem which has prompted the formulation of the two-truths notion. If this is so, it is unsurprising that the availability of the notion has made it easy to evade the problem in which it found its genesis. A generally competent polemicist such as Ricard disposes of the persistent subject, while deploying the notion of *karman* in a way that makes sense only on the postulate of a subject. He does not, in so many words, appeal to the two-truths notion to resolve this awkwardness, but it is plain enough from the context that this is his strategy. It is one that is commonly found. There would be no point in proceeding if it were to be allowed to pass. My concern is therefore to identify – and so make innocuous - a habit of evasiveness among polemicists and their followers. This is why I have brought up the notion of 'two truths' in the context of the identity problem. In no way am I suggesting that I have disposed of that notion. An offer to do that would require a discussion deeper and greatly extended in range.

Something more positive may be said in conclusion. Strong grounds for not letting pass what I take to be evasiveness are to be found in the impression left by the record of the Buddha's teaching as a whole. Throughout the early record, the Buddha's approach is the straightforward one of the resolution of difficulties through explanation. Though this process is conditioned by differences in circumstances, and by the concerns of various questioners, it is always directed towards making matters plain and clear, for all the recalcitrance of the topics sometimes addressed. All questions found to be answerable, and which are not frivolous, find an answer. [221] I find nothing in the early texts to justify the understanding of what are presented as truth-claims as being something else, whether existential strategies, or modes of social adaptation. [222] In one form or other, and with diversities of jargon, such a approach is in vogue. Its proponents might wish to press it here, even in the absence of footing. I prefer to follow the Buddha's practice, which on the evidence of the early texts is one of taking questions with an appearance of answerability to be answerable.

This is not to say that all questions are open to being put at all times. What I have called the identity problem could never have been put to the Buddha in anything like the terms in which it is now natural to express it. We can, however, imagine the Buddha being asked how personal persistence is conceivable, and how it should be understood. He could well have been asked about the consequences of different understandings for behaviour. Should we suppose that the Buddha would not have answered these questions? They seem not to be in the category of the unanswerable, as they have a manifest bearing on the end of suffering and on salvation. A celebrated passage in the Pali *Mahāparinibbanasutta* comes to mind. [223] The Buddha, close to death, avers that his teaching has had no distinction of 'inner' and 'outer'. It has not been characterised by "a teacher's fist' (*ācariya-muṭṭhi*) - that is, by anything grudging. There seems no good reason to prefer to this encouraging emphasis a different and later emphasis, whatever its philosophical fecundity.

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[221] Not all interesting questions are found answerable. Those bearing on the infinity and eternity of the world are instances.

[222] The more sophisticated expressions of views such as these may be given Wittgensteinian backing. I touch on this below. See section 92 and WITTGENSTEIN p 53.

[223]223 DN No.16. *Desito ānanda mayā dhammo anantaram abahiram karitvā; na tatth' ānanda tathāgatassa dhammesu ācariya-muṭṭhi.*

CHAPTER FOUR

Perplexities

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38. *Karman,* according to the Buddha

I gave some account of *karman* in Chapter Two. The word derives from the verbal root *kṛ*, (do, make). The basic sense of 'action' or 'doing' underlies the developed notion of *karman* with which we are concerned. The passage from Gombrich quoted above conveys the broad agreement among scholars that this notion originates in Vedic ritual.[224] In an exhaustive discussion, Professor Doniger O'Flaherty has related *karman* to the *śraddhā* ritual and to rebirth.[225] It must be a presupposition of ritual that the 'doing' of a sacrifice will have an outcome, and it is this that has come to be expressed more precisely in terms of the developed notion. So conceived, *karman* is not peculiarly Buddhist. It is prominent also in the brahmanical mainstream and in heterodox traditions other than Buddhism, notably in Jainism.

What may be peculiarly Buddhist is a further development. This finds its classic expression in the Buddha's celebrated words, *cetanāhaṃ bhikkhave kammaṃ vadāmi*, commonly translated, 'O monks, what I [emphatic] call *karman* is intention'. [226] Here is the plainest expression of the revaluation of karmic action which is fundamental to Buddhist ethics. Some ringing words from Gombrich make the point emphatically:

> … the Buddha's redefinition of 'action' as 'intention', an audacious use of language, turned the brahmin ideology upside down and ethicised the universe. I do not see how one could exaggerate the

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[224] See section 23 above.

[225]. DONIGER O'FLAHERTY (2), pp 9,10. This essay goes on to bring out the range of the *karman* notion across schools and sects and its elaboration and florescence in the Puranic period (roughly, the first Christian millennium).

[226] AN 6.63: *Nibbedhikasutta* [415]

> importance of the Buddha's ethicisation of the world, which I regard as a turning point in the history of civilisation. The Jains had taken a step in this direction ….[227]

Insofar as the words suggest that the Buddha's insistence has no precedent or parallel, this claim is overstated. Closely comparable redirections of emphasis are to be found in other traditions.[228] With this decided reservation, I concur with Gombrich and agree that the thoroughgoing quality of the Buddha's insistence finds no equal.

39. The varieties of *karman*

As part of the common stock of classical Indian philosophy, *karman* is effectively taken for granted. This must be why it is hard to find any systematic treatment of it in a mass of traditions rich in the systematic treatment of concepts. That point is made by Professor Rajendra Prasad in the long essay, *Karma, Causation and Retributive Morality,* from which I quote:

> ..... in spite of the great importance accorded to the law of karma, it has not been given a detailed conceptual or logical analysis or scrutiny either in any classical or contemporary work .... I have not been able to locate even a slightly detailed theoretical account of the law in any classical work .. (Prasad's emphasis) [229]

227 GOMBRICH (2) p.12.

228 There is much concern of the kind we would call 'ethical' in the brahmanical tradition. A similar transformation of view is to be found in the Hebrew prophets: ' I hate, I despise your feast days ... though you offer me burnt offerings and your meat offerings, I will not accept them. Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams?' (Amos 5 and Micah 7)

229 PRASAD pp.210 & 212.

This has also been my own experience, and Prasad's conclusion, grounded (I have no doubt) on a very wide acquaintance with the sources, is one I follow. The scope of the notion, on the part of those employing it, has to be inferred.

In the Buddhist record, we find a variety of applications, with a family resemblance. The three most important are:

> K1 This is the formation and perfection (or degradation) of character. It is what is to be found in the Buddha's review of his previous lives on the occasion of his enlightenment. A popular employment is in the Jataka stories. It is the application basic to Buddhist practice within a single - that is, the present - life. As such, it is hardly controversial. The Aristotelian parallel has already been considered: by way of exercise in the virtues - that is, in Buddhist terms, by way of accumulating *kuśala karman* - there is progress to a better, perhaps to a perfect, style of being.
>
> K2 This is the retribution of action, agreeable or disagreeable, perhaps quite unexpected, over the course of a life. The distinction from K1 is clearly not total, but K2 catches the sudden consequence of earlier action, *kuśala* or *akuśala*. It has the smack of reward, rather than of natural consequence, and so lacks the uncontroversial obviousness of K1. Though necessitated, K2 does not have the direct relation to character of K1.

Much the same distinction has been set out by Reichenbach, in what may be the only full study of the karman-doctrine by a Western philosopher. I have not employed Reichenbach's terms in stating the distinction, but I find it well caught by his reference to

> .. its effects on the dispositions, character, passions and desires of the agent, or the creation of invisible qualities of merit and demerit which adhere to the agent. [230]

[230] REICHENBACH, p.1.

The two kinds of consequence described here correspond closely with what I have called K1 and K2.

> K3 This is the extension of K1 and K2 over a sequence of lives. It is the notion we have seen employed in my brief account of rebirth in Chapter One. *Karman* may be seen both as the cause of rebirth in general, and as its content – that is, as the determinant of each particular rebirth. Buddhist orthodoxy has it that the assurance of rebirth goes inevitably with the *karman*-notion and that only the confused will accept one without the other.

We also find more specialised applications. Two of these are:

> K4 This is the process that brings about rebirth as a god. It is to be found in the case of the individual who has been highly virtuous, but who is still attached to existence. The case is analogous to appointment to a job: the role is determined and the 'job' a matter of the discharge of this role. The characteristics of the god may be taken to be fixed. The karmic flow of the person to be reborn has to be taken to accommodate 'itself' to that. In time, a very long time, the accumulated *karman* will be exhausted and the 'occupant' of the godhead fall to a lower state.
>
> K5 This is the case of what may be termed 'specialised embodiments'. An instance is the case of each successive Dalai Lama. It belongs to a phase of Buddhism outside our period, but I give it here as an example of how *karman* plays an explanatory role. Each newly discovered Dalai Lama is seen both as a rebirth of his predecessor and as a manifestation of Avalokitesvara, the Bodhisattva of compassion. In this last respect there seems to be a parallel with the Hindu notion of *avatāra* (divine manifestation).

The range of these applications is a wide one, perhaps suspiciously wide. There must be a question over the explanatory power of a notion that extends to K4 and K5, beyond the range K1 to K3. There may be a further question whether a notion with this span can

be fully coherent, and I will suggest grounds for this doubt below. As it is, it will be tempting to take K1 as the primary or typical case, and to see the other forms of *karman* as derivatives. K1 is not so much easy to credit as hard to deny; it is the peculiarly Buddhist expression of something which seems to be inherent in all moral reflection. It is hardly deniable that character can be formed, and that the process can be seen in causal terms and to have within it something that smacks of retribution - that is, of happy and unhappy consequences somehow merited. Here is the basis for what might be termed a 'modernist' Buddhism – that is, to one now more palatable. The temptation to make this move should however be resisted, as K2 and K3 are far too prominent in the tradition for it to be feasible to play down their significance. If anything, given the scholarly consensus, there would be more to be said for taking K2 as the primary case. Sacrifice is a matter of particular acts and particular consequences. This is of the essence of K2.

K1 and K2 may overlap and interconnect. From the very many instances of this in the record I take the *Culadhammasamadanasutta* in the Pali *Majjima Nikaya*.[231] This sets out four ways of 'undertaking things'. One's actions now may be pleasant and their future consequences painful; they may be painful and their consequences painful; they may be painful and their consequences pleasant; they may be pleasant and their consequences pleasant. All four of these possibilities are workings-out of *karman*. The first case is that of the self-deluder and hedonist who is preparing trouble for himself; the second that of the self-torturer; the third that of the man with a bad karmic inheritance who yet 'practises' diligently – that is, follows the Buddha's teaching; the fourth (perhaps the person of the third in a future birth) that of the man with a happy - and merited - inheritance, who can move on to felicity. Here we see that matters are not always obvious and straightforward; it takes great insight to see where we are on the Path. Generally, right action brings felicity, but this general truth, as it must be held to be, may not stand out from a welter of happenings. Here we find both the *karman* of self-training and that of merit.

40. *Karman* and memory

[231] MN No.45.

Apart from its expression as K1, the *karman*-notion is likely to strike the Westerner as curious and unsupported. This perplexity may be eased by an appreciation of the analogy between the karmic process and memory. In consideration of rebirth, memory is often presented as the source and mode of validation of rebirth-claims. Only in the direct experience of the enlightened or of those close to enlightenment, does the karmic process itself become the object of awareness. It is tempting to see memory as itself a manifestation of *karman* - as consequence, if not as 'ethically conditioned consequence', as I have glossed the term. It is more faithful to the texts, however, to see the two processes as closely parallel. For the Westerner, both will be seen as person-forming. Memory is held to be produced by the *saṃskāra/saṅkhāra* process. This gives it the same etymological ground as *karman*: the verbal element *kāra*, in *saṃskāra*, and the word *karman* are both derivatives of the root *kṛ*. The connection seems more than just etymological; memory and *karman* go together in practice. Memory figures in Buddhaghosa's account of the rebirth process. He describes the case of an evil-doer who, immediately before death, apprehends the sign of all the 'bad' *karman* of his lifetime, which will bring about hs unhappy rebirth. [232] It figures in day-to-day *karman*-governed existence. I may have a flash of anger towards someone. This comes back as a painful memory. It will also come back, if not cancelled by an over-riding 'good' action, as a painful karmic consequence. Or will the pain of the memory be itself the consequence, something to be lived with until naturally spent? On either understanding, memory seems to offer the best first step towards understanding *karman*. At the least, there is an imaginative equivalence.

41. *Karman* and moral significance

It stands out from the analysis which I have offered that *karman* is at the heart of the Buddha's assertion of moral significance. This is evident throughout the record of his teaching, whether addressed to his followers or brought out in debate with others. In the Pali *Sāmannaphalasutta*, the Buddha hears an account of the arguments, or bare assertions, of the well-known teacher, Purana Kassapa, to the effect that action counts for nothing.[233] It is plain from the detail of this account that this means that morality is

[232] Vism [548]
[233] DN No.2.

nothing. The Buddha does not deal directly with this, but responds with the vigorous claim that the way of life of the *sāmanna* (recluse, ascetic) is far from nothing: it bears 'fruit', the term employed, with others, for the outcome of *karman*. Determinations of the human will – that is, manifestations of *cetanā* – will be grounded in the *mulāni* (roots), whether *kuśalāni* or *akuśalāni*, and will have consequences, good or bad, desired or not. It cannot be a matter of indifference what these determinations are. Only in this way, on the presumption of *karman*, could the moral scepticism of the Buddha's opponents be rebutted, or their confusion removed. [234] This last point will be central to any final view to be taken of *karman*. I will come back to it in my concluding chapter.

Here, we may recall a line of thought advanced by Kant.[235] It is to the effect that morality is autonomous – Kant's repeated insistence – yet virtue needs to be rewarded if the highest good is to be attained. On the postulate of an omnipotent and benevolent being, this can be assured. Therefore, by something of a leap of faith, we can trust in the reality of such a being. It is worth noting, as we recall Kant's conclusion, that those who accept the *karman*-notion will also find an assurance of the necessary conjunction of virtue and happiness. They need not be led on to belief in God. The operation of an impersonal law is enough, *pace* Kant, to meet Kant's purposes.

I offer what seems to be a point against Kant in passing. Of more immediate interest is the possibility that a Kantian argument might be enlisted in support of the *karman*-notion. This line of thought may be tempting, but would, I think, be misleading. The most we can see in the Buddhist record is the presumption of the necessary connection of virtue and well-being. One who follows the Buddha's counsel should enjoy an early and obvious well-being, as is granted by the Buddha's questioner in the sutta just considered. *Karman* is not a phenomenon to be postulated if the picture is to be complete. On the Buddhist view, it is something to be seen in day-to-day operation, perceptible (it seems to be suggested) to all but the wilfully blind.

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[234] Purana Kassapa is one of several opponents dealt with in this way. As a group, they are characterised by disregard of *karman* or by muddled apprehension of it.
[235] The presentation I follow is the one found in *The Critique of Pure Reason*. See KANT, A 805 and B 833 and following pages. Keown discusses its presentation in *The Critique of Practical Reason*. See KEOWN p.126

Is Kant’s argument a good argument, even if it points to a conclusion broader than Kant’s and one which would not have met his concern? It has been much criticised, and I can only say that it seems open to the obvious objection, well expressed by Mackie, that ‘… any such argument [as Kant’s] is back to front. What it is reasonable or rational to do may depend upon the facts, but the facts cannot depend upon what it is reasonable or rational to do’. [236] All that is to our present purpose is that on the Buddhist *karman*-notion there are none of the difficulties which lie behind a classic problem of theodicy.

42. The credibility and appeal of *karma*n

For all the scholarly consensus over the origins of the *karman*-notion, it may still be a question how it came to be so widely credited. Here I can do no more than offer suggestions. One is that *karman* was never clearly disengaged from the wider notion of ‘cause’. This wider notion will always be taken uncritically - except by philosophers - and *karman* has tended to enjoy the same virtual immunity from appraisal. To ask how *karman* works will seem to amount to asking how causation works. On this view, the *karman*-notion is one expression of the so-called law of universal causation, though one with a peculiar jargon attached to it. It follows that the question of how *karman* works is as little answerable as the general question as to how effects come about. It is too general for answerability, and each particular response has to be along the lines that ‘it all depends’.

Another is by way of recalling that the *karman*-notion is widely focussed. I have pointed out five distinct applications. To the extent that even one of these is plausible, the others will come in for something of its credibility. I have already suggested that the reality of K1 is hardly deniable. It is evidently a moral commonplace, to be found under a wide variety of forms, perhaps in all traditions of thought. What I have picked out as K1 in the Buddhist tradition is caught memorably by George Eliot’s dictum, that ‘character is destiny’.[237] It seems likely that the persuasive power of one kind of use

[236] MACKIE (2) p.228. I am not suggesting that such a reply disposes of Kant’s argument so as to end discussion of the subject. The argument retains much vitality, and is deployed, with qualifications, by Kung. See KUNG, p.68.
[237] To be found in *The Mill on the Floss*, by way of a reference to Novalis. I enlarge on this line of thought in Chapter Seven.

spreads across the whole range of applications, giving each of the others something of its plausibility.

How and why the *karman*-notion has had so wide an appeal is another question. This is more easily answered, as the notion plainly offers a kind of satisfaction not otherwise found. Theistic religion offers the same satisfaction, but with less assurance. Belief in an omnipotent and benevolent deity should ensure that what happens in the world will be just. While justice ranges more widely than desert, due retribution, and the allotment of suffering and beatitude, will be held to lie at its heart. It is the common experience of the believer that this cannot be seen to be the case; there is a steady note of complaint in consequence. Job cannot see the justice of his suffering; the Psalmist cannot see the justice of the non-suffering of wrong-doers (‘Why do the wicked prosper?’).

In the Buddhist tradition, and in the wider Indian context, it must be part of the appeal of the *karman*-notion that justice is guaranteed. It comes, not through the will of a deity, but by process of law. The law needs space for its operations, and the notion of rebirth, to which I will shortly proceed, ensures that justice will finally be done. The appeal of this seems close to that of the Kantian notion to which I have referred above. The appeal of rebirth, at least to the virtuous, corresponds to that of the hope of immortality, which Kant thinks it reasonable to entertain. The parallel may be close, but it is less than total: we will see below that in the Buddhist case there are the questions of justice to whom and of the final beatitude of what.

43. Does *karman* settle everything?

It will be a question whether *karman* settles everything. What is the scope of karmic action? Does it provide a complete explanation of phenomena or states of affairs? There is much to be found in the record to suggest that it does not. In a Pali sutta already referred to, there is a listing of bodily afflictions and their causes. Among such causes as change of climate and violence we find ‘the fruiting of *kamma*’ (*kammavipāka*).[238] Is this quite distinct from those other – as we would say, ‘natural’ – causes? Are those others – always or sometimes – expressions of karmic outcome? How

[238] AN X 60 [110]

can one tell what is attributable to *karman* and what is not? Here is the main point of perplexity.[239]

The question of scope is conspicuous in dialogues between the Buddha and the Jains. The *Devadahasutta* in the Pali *Majjhima Nikāya* is such a case.[240] Here it is made plain that *karman* does not determine all action and there are other systems of causation. Buddhism is not made a fatalist system by its assertion of *karman*, and this is made clear to the Jains: not all painful present feeling should be attributed to past action. The supposition that it may be so attributed might lead to the disregard of present responsibility. The force of moral precept, with its presumption of free and responsible action hangs on this non-acceptance of fatalism.

There is, however, much else to be found which points to a different conclusion. I have in mind explanations that attribute everything of any moment that happens in life to a karmically based appropriateness. These are ubiquitous. I take an apposite example from the Sanskrit *Divyāvadana*, a collection of narratives largely concerned with *karman*. Their content differs from what we find in the canon in elaboration rather than essential purport. At the end of a picaresque tale, which has received a Buddhist treatment, the monks question the Buddha about the successive rebirths of the central figure, Purṇa. They ask (I paraphrase): what did Purṇa do, what action (*karman*) was done, in consequence of which he arose in a family of much wealth, and in the womb of a slave, eventually cutting off all defilement and becoming an *arhat* (a perfected one)? The Buddha replies that Purṇa has indeed 'heaped up' the *karman* that has brought about these various consequences. He describes the force of accumulated action; it is like a stream. The force of actions is never lost. Causes eventually ripen, if only after a vast expanse of time: 'they are not lost, even in hundreds of kalpas (aeons); achieving completeness and time, the actions of beings fruit indeed'.[241] This illustrates the point with some colour. The kind and circumstances of each rebirth and much else besides are

[239] We find it said that *karman* governs what matters most in life – and presumably only that. This view is widely held and I have heard Gombrich endorse it in discussion. I know of nothing in the early texts to support it, at least not clearly and with emphasis.

[240] MN No. 101

[241] *Na praṇaśyanti karmāni api kalpasatair api/ sāmagrīm prāpya kālam ca phalanti khalu dehinām.* In a note (184) to his translation and discussion of this story, Tatelman remarks that 'this verse and the preceding paragraph form a stock description of the operation of the law of karma'. I agree, if by 'karma' we mean K2. See TATELMAN p.95; also see this note for textual references to the *Divyāvadāna.*

to be ascribed to *karman*. The case is not one of K1 – that is, of a slow, but cumulative, perfection of character; it is, rather one of K2 extended by K3, Someone living at some large distance of time from an action and (it can be assumed) quite without knowledge of the previous agent will, quite inescapably, enjoy or suffer a consequence. Here there seems to be more than a small concession to the fatalism which, on other occasions, the Buddha's teaching is so plainly pitched to avoid.

This last point may be made in another way. In pointing out the common operation of K1 and K2 in the *Culadhammasamadanasutta*, I may have implied that that co-operation was assured. This seems not to be so. One can imagine a practitioner resolved to conform his actions to the *marga* – that is, to act with a view to K1. If such a person then suffers misfortunes which seem to fall together, he may be inclined to ascribe these, if not to pure chance, to the operation of K2. There is plenty of warrant in the texts for such a conclusion. Suppose he had previously been the adulterer envisaged by the *Dhammapāda*, already referred to, suffering only now for the actions of another man – as ordinary usage would have it ('At that time, P was Q'). Such an outcome must surely impair his resolution. His view of what befalls him will be of the kind, 'it has to happen'. This looks like a case where acceptance of fatalist assumptions may be demoralising. The immediate point, for the present argument, is that *karman*-doctrine, as we have it, seems less than fully coherent.

Another question is whether it is always right to act with regard to *karman* – that is, with a view to karmic consequences. After all that has been said above, this may seem absurd. Buddhist ethics is karmic through and through: incapable, it seems, of admitting an affirmative response without self-destruction. Yet the question is a lively one. Consider the case of a professing Buddhist in a poor country, who is found to be catching fish. This is a plain breach of the first precept, that against taking life, and as clear a case of *akuśala karman* as could be found. If challenged, the man pleads that he has to fish to feed his family. He might say: 'I am obliged to feed my family and so obliged to catch fish'. How far can such a riposte be brought within the scope of debate? Such dilemmas, extending to the broader case of 'the necessary murder', are not infrequent in the Buddhist tradition, which should be inhospitable to them. A classic example is the case of Prince Viśvantara/Vessantara, with which I have dealt above. In presenting the Buddhist scheme as a case of 'virtue ethics', I suggested that, for the

'deluded' – that is, most of us - acting in partial ignorance is inescapable. [242] Everyone who has yet to reach Nirvana will be deluded to a degree. At least there need be no stigmatisation of the fisherman, who – we assume - will have adopted the first precept, as 'insincere'.[243]

44. How does *karman* work?

In giving an account of how the *karman*-notion came about and of why it came to be credited, I have perhaps pointed to deeper conclusions. In the field of religious belief, to explain may amount to explaining away. Explanation may, in fact, be a discreet form of explosion. Hume's presentation of the basis of religious beliefs is an example of this, in line (one can have no doubt) with Hume's intention.[244] In the present case, some obvious difficulties in the way of subscription to the *karman*-notion will already have become apparent. Ethicised *karman* seems no easier to credit than sacrificial *karman*. If we reject, as I have said we should, the 'modernist' reinterpretation, we need to find a plausible account of K2. I must therefore consider the bare credibility of the notion. The discussion above will have shown that that question is hardly distinguishable from another, that of how *karman* functions. A plausible account will be one which – at once – shows why we need the notion and makes comprehensible its working. As may be apparent, an account which achieves the second purpose is likely to be subversive of the first. To the extent that karmic explanation is readily accommodated, it is likely to seem redundant.

Fiction may show this more clearly than works of polemic or devotion. Some of the richest treatments of the topic are to be found outside the canon, in stories of a devotional, but entertaining, kind. The writer of such a story will need to show – beyond what happens - what has to happen, with an inevitability grounded in character and

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[242] Section 19 above

[243] This point has been put by Philippa Foot in criticising Hare: 'Hare … who so defined the prescriptive use of language that anyone who assents to a prescriptive proposition that in circumstances C an action A is morally wrong, but nevertheless does A in C, is as a matter of logic insincere – said something that is not true'. Foot supposes, surely rightly, that the implication she is criticising is inescapable, given the way Hare's 'prescriptivism' is set up. FOOT p.20.

[244] I refer to Hume's *The Natural History of Religion.* See HUME (3).

circumstances. To show what had to happen on account of *karman* may be a problem, as this may either be indistinguishable from 'what has to happen', or it will be intrusive. The 18th Century Chinese novel translated as *The Story of the Stone*, also as *The Dream of the Red Chamber*, raises this problem – and, it may be thought, solves it. [245] Its authors take care to present outcomes both explicable in natural terms and as karmic consequences. The distinguished, but improvident, family round which the story is set loses all its money. The premature death of one of its members, a seemingly healthy young woman, is presented as more clearly karmic: the sufferer herself reflects that she must have done something very bad – in a previous life, she assumes – to have incurred – that is, merited – such a fate.

The prime difficulty with *karman* – as K2 - comes into sharp relief with these instances. It is one of the scope of karmic action. As an explanation it seems superfluous in the case of the improvident family. In the case of the premature death it seems, not indeed so clearly superfluous, but of a kind that requires also the operation of natural causes. This raises the question whether these natural causes would not have been enough.[246] The *karman*-notion looks like a fifth wheel on a vehicle than runs well enough on four. An account of the operation of *karman* in terms of natural causes will make the notion seem dispensable. Any other account will, it seems, strain credibility or – as the price for straining credibility less – drain from the notion a large part of its point and motivating force.

Here we have grounds for the perplexity which, I have to conclude, attaches to every version of *karman* but K1. The same difficulty is evident in cases of natural disaster. Suppose there is an earthquake leaving thousands dead. Here is a notorious problem within theodicy for believers in a benevolent god. It is also a problem here, for believers in *karman* as K2. Is the earthquake to be attributed to the workings of *karman*? If so and if all the casualties are to be attributed to *karman*, how was their co-location brought about? Or did only some of them suffer because they had to, in which case, what of the

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[245] CAO XUEQIN & GAO E.

[246] The same point bears on consideration of divine action, of unpredictable and dramatic kinds. Hare asks: 'What is the difference between the statement that there is a god who, if we perform the right ritual, makes the fire burn, and the statement that the fire will burn if we do the specified series of operations? … [God's] existence or non-existence makes no difference to observable phenomena.' HARE (3) p.24.

remainder? The perplexity that comes from this line of reflection hardly needs emphasis. The appeal of considering only natural causes will stand out.[247]

The consideration of Parfit's work to which I move in my next chapter will involve reference to *karman* and will touch on the various perplexities which have been considered here. I come back to it also in my concluding chapter, which will take stock of what is left for Buddhist ethics after this consideration. What has been said so far will have suggested that, for all its historical importance, *karman* has little claim on the attention of living philosophers. This is not my position. I shall claim that the notion is one that cannot be discarded without some impoverishment of moral vocabulary. It has to be retained in any restatement of basic Buddhist ethics, however much modified.

45. Rebirth by way of *karman*

What I will call the rebirth-notion is the notion implicit in claims of the kind 'Smith has been reborn as Jones'. It is to be found in the reports of persons claiming insight into what they take to be previous lives, and in the accounts of others, notably of the Buddha himself, whose insight penetrates the whole process. I have shown that the notion is implicit in the *karman*-notion. *Karman* is bound to 'fruit', and may do so in a later existence than that of the originating agent, not necessarily the next, and - in a vital sense - bring about that existence. This was the process described in the case of Purṇa. The perplexities attaching to the *karman*-notion are such that a notion so far involved with it as that of rebirth may seem hardly worth discussing. In the context of my main argument this might seem evasive. I therefore begin with the conception of rebirth to be derived from the early texts. When we look at the Abhidharma and the later commentarial texts, especially the *Visuddhimagga*, we find a rather different emphasis.

[247] A recent obituary notice recorded that its subject died 'when he was struck by a power cable brought down by a storm'(*The Times,* 12 February 2007). It is just such a catastrophe which we might find attributed to *karman.* In a different religious context, it might have been attributed to the wrath of God. Buddhist polemicists have at least an easier case to argue than traditional theists. The latter will have a problem if there was nothing notably wicked about the victim. Buddhists are able to suggest that 'there must have been' something to explain what happened, no doubt some action within a past life. This suggestion is, at once, unrebuttable and short on persuasive force.

This may amount to a criticism of the earlier one, even to an essentially different claim.[248]

46. What kind of rebirth?

The belief that there is carrying-on through death – to use the least specific expression – is widely found and has had many forms. In the sorting out these beliefs, it will be helpful to pose two questions:

(a) When I am dead, does my soul go on?

(b) When my body is dead, do I go on?

The first of these is Socrates' question, posed and answered to the speaker's satisfaction in the *Phaedo*. The answer is 'Yes', by which Plato means that the soul will continue into another existence. In dealing with Plato's account of the soul and its transmigration, I suggested that the soul of this account was item (4) on the tabulation in Chapter Three, but – it seemed – also item (3), the relation of (4) and (3) being uncertain. For the reasons given above, Socrates' question cannot be the Buddhist's concern.

The second is the Buddha's question. It will be answered 'No' by Buddhists, in respect of the Buddha himself and of those few others who have realised Nirvana and so will not be reborn, and 'Yes' in respect of everyone else.[249] The doctrine to be found in the early texts seems quite clear: it is expressed in such reports by the Buddha as 'A has been reborn as B' or 'At that time Sariputta was X'. In the later commentarial texts, as we shall see, its expression is not so clear-cut, but the doctrine is no less central.

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[248] In discussing personal continuity and rebirth, here and in the next Chapter, I have found useful stimulus in a thesis by Dr Nigel Tetley. See TETLEY.

[249] The Buddhist claim is that rebirth is universal. The arguments in support would be the same, one must assume, should the claim be that only some living things are reborn, though it would then need to be explained how those suffering rebirth were picked out. I need not go into this.

47. What might amount to rebirth?

The answer to the second question to be found in the Buddhist tradition prompts further questions, and I will be concerned with three of these. They bear on its intelligibility, on its point and on the grounds for crediting it.

Intelligibility goes with the question of what rebirth amounts to. A living thing dies; a living thing is born. With rebirth in mind, we might see one or more of the following instances of this sequence as amounting to it:

(A) Smith dies. At the same moment, Jones is conceived. There is nothing more to the process but this coincidence in time.

(B) Smith dies. At the same moment, Jones is conceived and for some reason – let us suppose - would not have been conceived had not Smith died. Otherwise, as (A).

(C) Smith dies. As (B), except that Jones turns out to have capacities possessed by Smith, and his possession of these is baffling. For instance, Jones was three years old when he was found to have a good knowledge of the London Underground. Jones has been brought up in France and has never been to London. Smith was a Tube-travelling Londoner.

(D) Smith dies. As (C), but Jones is found to have, not only information within the public sphere, but also information peculiar to Smith – for instance, the date of Smith's mother's birthday – and, perhaps, also some of Smith's attachments and loyalties. An example of these, evident on Jones's maturity, might be the experience of lovers: not only 'we were made for each other', but 'I've met you before'.

(E) Smith dies. As (B), except that the conditions of Jones's existence are what they are because Smith's life was what it was. For example, Smith's life was morally bad and therefore Jones's life is miserable.

Example (A) is of succession in time only. Example (B) brings in the necessitation of Jones's existence, though not of its quality. No lodgement for the rebirth-claim is to found in either. I will say no more of (A) or (B).

In respect of (C) and (D), I will assume that Jones's memory-experiences are found to be veridical. At least two claims might then be made. One is the simple and limited claim that Jones has some of Smith's memories. This may be called the Memory claim. The Memory claim need not amount to one of carrying-on through death, though many of those advancing it take it to do so. We will see in the next chapter that it is very much what is envisaged in Parfit's presentation of 'quasi-memory'. Stronger than this is the Going-on-claim, to the effect that such memories and other connections are evidence of the perpetuation of an entity, or that they constitute that perpetuation. Where the memories and other connections are numerous and significant, as in (D), there will be a broader basis for the assertion that Jones 'was' Smith. This is the claim which we find everywhere in the early literature, through such expressions as 'At that time, Sariputta was X'.

Example (E) is the type of case on which the Buddhist doctrine of rebirth is founded. It may be seen as a special instance of the Going-on claim. What makes it special is the introduction of *karman*. On the postulate of *karman*, a continuing entity, as Smith, has the experience of one life and then, as Jones, the experience of another. A continuing entity's birth as Jones will be conditioned, the conditioning, as we saw in considering *karman*, being the volitions and actions of Smith. The experience that is had as Jones is inevitable and merited. It may be accompanied by memories of Smith's experiences, as with Examples (C) and (D), and these may be evidence of the karmic connection without constituting it. This is what the orthodox Buddhist will take the rebirth-notion, in its simplest application, to amount to. For simplicity, I disregard applications involving the consequences of lives well before the most recent, and those marked by the concurrent effects of good and bad actions.

There are two obvious objections, which seem to bear both on the 'bare' Going-on-claim founded on (D) and on the specifically Buddhist version of that claim founded on (E). One is conceptual. It is the problem is one of how one living thing can possibly become another. There is an obstinate difficulty in conceiving this, beyond the one of

seeing how it might come about. Such becoming is quite distinct from the going through stages of a living thing, even stages of such sharply different appearance as those of the chrysalis and the caterpillar.

I will open the next chapter with some reference to Locke's work, which will be preliminary to consideration of Parfit's. I must now anticipate this, as it bears directly on the conceptual problem and is admirably lucid. Locke's concern is with the identity of the living thing – that is, of 'the man', in the case of the human species. His immediate concern is to show that this is not secured by the persistence of a soul, but the point does not have to be made with this in view to be telling. Locke claims that 'the identity of the same man consists . . . in nothing but a participation of the same continued life, by constantly fleeting particles of matter, in succession vitally united to the same organised body.'[250] I take this to be the careful formulation of something hardly disputable. A similar point is made by Geach, who points out that, where it is true that 'at that time, Sariputta was X', it should be possible for Sariputta to say 'I was X'.On this model, I might find grounds for saying 'I was Julius Caesar'. Can I then say 'I crossed the Rubicon'? This claim seems plainly false, as we are talking about different men. If I grant that I did not cross the Rubicon, it will be a question what point and substance there is to my claim that I was Julius Caesar. [251]

The point I am making does not, I think, depart from what is widely supposed. If it did, and if I were therefore to need to, I would draw more fully on some powerful arguments by Kripke, supported by Mackie. [252] As it is, I need point only to Kripke's point that a given woman – he instances the Queen – could not have been born of parents other than the parents from whom she actually came. Recognition of this is quite compatible with seeing that we might be mistaken about whose child she was, and that any given person might have a quite different destiny, so acquiring a different character and so a different karmic formation – in that sense being a different person. As Kripke puts it: 'It seems to me that anything coming from a different origin would not be this object'. In broad support of this, Mackie observes: 'Necessities of origin yield counterfactual essencies for individuals, just as necessities of constitution yield …. counterfactual essencies for stuffs like gold'. Here we seem to have a fatal objection to any straightforward

[250] LOCKE pp.331/32.
[251] GEACH p.6
[252] KRIPKE p.113; MACKIE (1) p.153.

acceptance of such claims as ‘at that time, Sariputta was X’. If this claim is to have any plausibility at all, it will have to be understood differently. _

The other objection, not purely conceptual, finds an answer of a sort. It is well brought out by the contrasting case of metamorphosis, found everywhere in the literature of fantasy. Lucius Apuleius suffers metamorphosis and acquires the body of an ass, but is otherwise unchanged. [253] Metamorphosis is like nothing else, and it must be a question whether we should say that Lucius has become an ass, albeit with some oddities, or that he has stayed a man, acquiring some gross disabilities, such as braying by way of speech. What makes this a real question is that the ass has had no previous existence in which ass-specific, and peculiar, characteristics might have been acquired. Lucius’ transformation or ‘entry’ into another is therefore at least imaginable.

The difference between this and what is involved in our consideration will be apparent. In the case of Smith and Jones, it seems that the ‘receiving’ entity is bound to have specific characteristics, at a minimum those coming from its distinguishing parentage. It has never been an empty container, as the ass of the fantasy is. A newly born child owes – to say the least - very much of its make-up to its parents. Appreciation of this ‘debt’ did not have to wait until explanation in terms of genetics became available. Much of it is plainly observable, most obviously family resemblance: children can often be seen to resemble their parents. The Buddhist tradition has no single account of how rebirth comes about. I touch on this below, but will say now that on all accounts it is granted that continuation by way of *karman* goes along with fertilising sexual intercourse: both are needed for a new life to come into being. There will therefore be two ‘claimants’, the karmic element and the element derived from parental inheritance, bidding for the same ‘space’. How is their coexistence within it to be arranged?

There is a ready answer to this, which is that rebirth must be taken to be brought about by *karman* in a greatly extended sense of ‘brought about’. Karmic conditioning fits with normal – that is, parental- conditioning in that the choice of ‘receiving’ entity is itself determined by *karman*. The conditions of each rebirth, by virtue of their determination

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[253] I refer to the picaresque Latin novel, translated as *The Golden Ass*. See Bibliography.

by karman, will be apt and merited. [254] *Ex hypothesi*, there can be no co-existence of incompatibles in the same space. Here is the answer to the second objection, though one that is available only to those who accept the *karman*-notion. It will not serve those who advance the Going-on claim on the basis of memory-connections alone, as at (3) and (4) above.

The answer also brings up complications of its own. If I merit bad parents in a future birth - perhaps on account of my deficiencies as a parent in this one - do these parents merit the unappealing child I shall no doubt turn out to be? If the answer has to be 'Yes', how do we suppose this proper conjunction to be brought about? What conceivable process ensures the 'right' child for the 'right' parents? Reflection on what would be required to ensure this will show how much would have to be determined, most obviously the conjunction of the parents – and so of their parents? – along with all the contingencies going with any one conception. Such reflection makes it clear that no one karmic stream could be considered in isolation, if we assume, as we would have to, that 'its' encounters with others would be in accordance, at least to some degree, with these others' karmic allotments. Here we glimpse the descent into the fatalism which much else of the Buddha's teaching was concerned to repudiate. All this seems decidedly perplexing. [255]

This line of criticism is, perhaps, open to be parried with the insistence that karmic desert will sooner or later be brought about, but 'later' may be late indeed. The words quoted above from the *Divyāvadāna* convey precisely that.[256] Buddhaghosa's account of the matter has it that the *karman* which will 'fruit' – that is, deliver desert - will take root only where the conditions for its reception are perfectly fitting.[257] One can see that if a limitless expanse of time is envisaged this could indeed be expected to come about. The difficulty is that that an explanation so comprehensive explains nothing with which

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[254] A classic commentarial expression of this is to be found in the *Milindapañha*: Miln [65]. This makes it clear that *karman* determines the lifespan, the looks, and the wealth and status of the birth-family – to instance no more – of the entity reborn. As an authority the text instances a sutta (MN No.135).

[255] Reichenbach and more than one of the contributors to DONIGER O'FLAHERRTY (1) address themselves to this difficulty. I think it fair to say that they find it intractable. See REICHENBACH, p 35.

[256] Section 43 above

[257] Vism [600/01]. Translation pp.696/97. This is made especially clear by the Commentary.

anyone can – realistically – be concerned. It can have no more force than the declaration that anything conceivable as happening will some day happen, given enough time.

I hope it is now clear what might amount to rebirth, as it figures within the basic Buddhist claim. The notion is one of continuity by way of karmic connection - in principle accompanied, in practice sometimes evidenced, by memory - involving not only the continuity that will be held to be personal but also a fitness of bodily connection. This should make it a subtler claim than versions of the Going-on-claim without such elaboration. I think it would be claiming too much to say that it escapes all objections to the Going-on –claim, such as that presented above to the very conception of 'going on'. In that light, is this Buddhist claim at least intelligible? Such grounds as there are for finding it so have, I trust, emerged from the discussion above. The most that it seems possible to claim is that it belongs within the Buddhist context, inseparable in this respect and in practice from *karman*. If coherence alone were in question, this might count for much. It hardly seems to tell in favour of intelligibility.

48. The commentarial Buddhist claim

I have presented an account of rebirth which might stand as an answer to what I called the Buddha's question:

(b) When my body is dead, do I go on?

This has simplified matters, perhaps overmuch. Many Buddhist advocates would find my treatment of the subject to have conceded too much to the assumptions of those who would have pressed the first question, the one I found characteristic of Socrates. From this viewpoint, a proper presentation of the Buddhist view of rebirth should be expressed in terms of the analysis of the subject by way of the *skandhāḥ*. What I have called Jones should be seen as an aggregation of *skandhāḥ* in succession, as can only be the case, from an earlier aggregation, that which I called Smith. On this analysis, the

subject is a bundle in a state of constant flux. On death, the flow continues by means of a process of which accounts vary, but which involves at least the continuity of the *skandhāḥ* of consciousness (*vijñāna*) and of karmic elements (*saṃskārā*) in a fresh conception. The image to have in mind is that of the stream: in our understanding of such claims as ‘at that time Sariputta was X’ - we should think of X and of Sariputta as stages in the onward flowing of a stream: X is ‘upstream’, and Sariputta is ‘downstream’. Buddhaghosa, at the end of our period, with the Pali Abhidhamma behind him, insists that Sariputta is neither the same as X nor different. In rebirth there is no migration of a past entity, yet the fresh entity does not come into being uncaused.[258] He sums up: *tasmā ettha na ekantam ekata vā nanata vā upagantabba* (therefore neither sameness nor different-ness should be postulated absolutely here).[259]

Do we then have two Buddhist conceptions of rebirth, on one of which the answer is ‘Yes’ to the second of the two questions with which I opened, and another on which the answer is ‘Yes’ to a different question, which might be expressed as follows?

> (c) When my body is dead, is there going-on, of a kind
> conditioned by the volitions and actions (the *cetanā*)
> of the earlier life or of earlier lives?

There are indeed two conceptions, and my account of the matter should have brought out their distinction. The second, which I have summed up in the words of Buddhaghosa, though it long pre-dates him, is presented as an interpretation of the first. It is surely too radical a departure to count as that. It is at best an undeclared – perhaps unconscious - criticism of the first. So viewed, it has decided merits. It offers at least a partial answer to the objections, summarised above, to the basic Buddhist claim. We do not have to imagine one man ‘becoming’ another through rebirth. What is implied by an affirmative answer to Question (c) is something much less specific than the account presented above of the comprehensive and congruent arrangement of karmic chains.

The commentarial Buddhist claim has the further merit of providing an answer to the challenge put by Paul Edwards which I quoted in my opening remarks.[260] On this later

[258] Vism [553]. Translation p.638.
[259] Vism [554]. Translation p.639.
[260] See p.11 above.

claim, there is no discrete part (Edwards' 'substance') and also no 'bundle' identical with what came before. The image is of a stream, and we can quote Buddhaghosa's words to explain what follows from that. Here is an answer, though it is doubtful how far it is a good one. The obvious riposte is that suggested by Edwards, that the stream fails to ensure 'survival of the original person'.

It is a manifestation of the problem which I have made my subject – the identity problem - that there are two conceptions of rebirth. Here again the problem can be seen to issue in the simultaneous assertion of incompatibles. This means that the fundamental difficulty persists. According to my opening account of the matter, the Buddha spoke as if X and Sariputta were distinct. If he had not done so, the point of his declaration would have been lost. Only a long karmic process brought X to the point of being Sariputta - so much is common ground - but this process must be taken to be one of a long self-discipline and self-training on the part of X and (no doubt) of a succession of intermediate beings, acting with sufficient insight to envisage a goal. At least to a degree that admits this succession, reference to discrete entities seems inescapable. Such reference seems also the condition of any persuasive account of motivation. I hope it is no longer necessary to show how doubtful is its compatibility with what I might call the pure *skandha*-notion. Here, in fact, is the incompatibility which I pointed out in my opening chapter, in marking out the 'weak' and the 'strong' notions of the subject. Here too is the point on which Edwards seizes. On the 'strong' view, considered first, continuity through death seems inconceivable. On the 'weak' view, that of the 'stream', continuity may be conceivable but not in a way that perpetuates identity.

I need not, I think, deal further with the riposte, often made, that we are misled on this point by the language that we have no choice but to use. Buddhaghosa's recourse is to the doctrine of the 'two-truths'. It is on that which he relies on this in the context of the remarks quoted above, urging that talk of an 'experiencer' is no more than conventional. [261] Here, I can only say that such an invocation, whatever its point or contribution to enlightenment in other contexts is no more than evasive in this one. In support of this summary dismissal, I can only refer back to my discussion of the two-truths notion.

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[261] Vism [555]. Translation p.640.

49. The Middling Claim

This must be the occasion for introducing another approach to the question. It is distinct from those discussed already in bearing on 'what matters' rather than on 'how things are'. Examples (C), (D) and (E) may be the basis for what I will call the Middling-claim. On the Middling-claim, Smith is not asserted to become Jones but Jones is said to have very much of Smith about him. This will amount most obviously to memories, but may amount to more. Such a case would be that of example (4) above, with Jones supposed to have – for instance – the tastes, loyalties, distastes, and traits of character which characterised Smith. The Middling-claim is that though Jones has not 'been' Smith, as the rebirth-claim would have had it, Jones is so composed that the outcome is 'as good as' Jones's perpetuation of Smith would have been. We might say, from Smith's point of view, and assuming that Smith hopes for perpetuation, that it is 'as good as' Smith's perpetuation as Jones.

I call this the Middling-claim because it seems to represent a position between the Memory-claim, which (I have argued) is not one of perpetuation, and the Going-on-claim, at least on its stronger versions. It is specifically not one of going on, but it may be thought to catch what many people contemplating their decease might hold to be important in going on. Bare reflection on the components of rebirth-claim and counter-claim seems to bring it up. If we are baffled by what it would be to persist through death, we may find relief in pondering our concern to persist and reflecting how this concern might be met in quite other ways. We will see shortly that the Middling-claim finds a parallel in Parfit's understanding. It is at the heart of his assert that 'identity is not what matters'. I will discuss it in that context, and mention it here to bring out its place on the 'map' of conceptions, speculations and evaluations bearing on rebirth.

50. The point and credibility of the rebirth-notion

The point of the rebirth-notion has to be seen in soteriological terms. Its central place in the Buddhist scheme of things is attributable to the role of *karman* in the Buddha's vindication of moral significance. Action is held to have consequences, good and bad, and the range of these is not confined to one lifetime. Appreciation of this prospect will

be a large restraint on action. It should prompt anyone, Buddhist practitioner or not, to reflect that what afflicts us may have been merited, and that this consideration should govern the volitions and actions of the present life. I have mentioned more than once a typical instance of what might come to mind. This is the prospective fate of the adulterer in the Pali *Dhammapāda*. [262] He risks disagreeable things of a familiar kind and faces the prospect of a bad rebirth. To balance this, the prospective adulterer, or anyone else, might recall the steady accumulation of merit laid out entertainingly in the Jataka stories. In all this, the motivation towards action of the right sort will be clear and strong.

The credibility of the notion is less straightforward. The Memory claim is often brought up, and has often been presented as the substantiation of rebirth. It is on this basis that Professor Ian Stevenson, of the University of Virginia, presents what he takes to be cases of 'reincarnation'.[263] I have already suggested that the most that such evidence might support is the bare Memory claim – that is, that B has some of the deceased A's memories. Such a claim is remarkable but, by itself, quite modest in its implications. Its scope is well short of what Buddhists have needed to claim in the context of moral choice. This has not always been appreciated, and the specifically Buddhist claim has sometimes been supported by evidence of the kind presented by Stevenson.[264] Rebirth is prominent in the Buddha's account of his own enlightenment. Tetley points out that one of the three components of enlightenment is knowledge-from-the recollection-of-previous dwellings/lives (in Pali, *pubbenivāsānusatiñāñña*), and that this is a capacity which the advanced practitioner may hope to develop to some degree. He concludes however that *pubbenivāsānusatiñāñña*, whatever its importance, is not presented by the early texts as an argument for rebirth.[265] This must be because the grounds for crediting the Buddhist claim for rebirth are barely evidential. We have seen that rebirth is entailed by the doctrine of *karman*. Here is one good ground for accepting it. Another is that it was taught by the Buddha and the Buddha is to be trusted. These

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[262] See p.9 above.
[263] Stevenson, an academic psychologist, is probably the most prominent contemporary advocate of the claim that rebirth or 'reincarnation' is possible and sometimes found. He has examined numerous supposed cases, by no means uncritically. See STEVENSON.
[264] The various writings of Francis Storey, published by The Buddhist Publication Society, are an example of the backing-up of the Buddhist claim with evidence.
[265] TETLEY p.98ff

considerations will count for much among those already in the Buddhist tradition. They will have little persuasive force for those outside it.

There is a sense of 'credibility' different from the one just considered, one concerned not with a doctrine's claims to be believed on its merits but rather with the potential believer's ability to believe it. We will see in the next chapter that Parfit considers this distinction, and the problem it poses, after making the case for Reductionism.
Two lines of consideration suggest that there might be the same problem here. One is prompted by the publication of three works in the field of religious sociology, or anthropology, in each case around 1970, which have achieved something of a classic status, and to which I have already referred.[266] All three are concerned with Theravada Buddhism in countries where it has been the national religion for centuries. The convergence of their conclusions is impressive. Each offers an account of an official, and generally 'orthodox', Buddhist teaching in co-existence with popular beliefs. These beliefs are in some tension with orthodoxy, a tension contained by means of confining heterodox belief to its own sphere. At least some of these 'popular' beliefs seem attributable to a lack of ability to believe. A prominent case of this divergence of orthodox and popular is that of the rebirth-notion. In Burma and Thailand, practitioners who would certainly style themselves orthodox are found to take rebirth to be the transmission of an entity, the word employed for which can only be derived, in each case, from *vijñāna/viññāna* (consciousness). [267] It appears to be an unconditioned entity, a soul-substitute. The question for us is whether this view of the matter is no mere lapse from orthodoxy, but a modification barely avoidable, suggesting that the orthodox view is <u>beyond</u> belief. If the orthodox view is indeed unintelligible, this would not be surprising. Here is a real difficulty, it seems one of very long standing. One of the early texts records such a departure from orthodoxy, and attributes it to the *bhikkhu*, Sati. The Buddha rebukes Sati with unusual asperity for his cherishing of the idea that there exists such an entity, exempt from universal conditioning. [268]

Another line of consideration bears on the process by which rebirth comes about. It is one of which the Buddhist tradition gives more than one account. One such comes at a

[266] Page 30 above
[267] Tambiah reports the Thai term to be 'winjan'; Spiro the Burmese term to be 'wi-nyan'.
[268] *Mahatanhasankhayasutta*. MN No.38

later point in the exposition which answers Sati. This is at the margin of our concern and I need say only that accounts of the rebirth process become both more detailed and more diverse as the tradition develops. In the Pali recension of the early texts, there is reference to the presence of a *gandhabba* at the point of conception. When this presence goes with an act of intercourse and the right moment of the woman's menstrual cycle, there will be a new birth. What a *gandhabba* may be is hardly clear. Bhikku Bodhi translates – or interprets – the word as 'the being to be reborn'. [269] It has the look of a discrete entity, comparable to what performs the same role in accounts of the process within the Brahmanical tradition. [270] Yet the notion of a persistent entity running across lives is, we have just observed, directly excluded. An English re-translation of the Chinese translation of a parallel to the Pali *Aṅguttara Nikāya*, the Sanskrit *Ekottarāgama*, presents the word equivalent to *gandhabba* as 'consciousness –genius'. [271] This expression certainly suggests a transmission of consciousness, though - with two removes through translation from the original - it would be unsafe to put much weight on the point. Harvey discusses all this, helpfully but hardly conclusively. [272] Even in the Pali transmission, taken by itself, there is too much by way of suggestion and passing reference to be brought into unity.

Later accounts, in the Pali Abhidhamma and the commentarial texts, describe the conditioning of the first thought-moment of the 'new' life by the last such moment of the previous one. This is Buddhaghosa's account, calculated – it seems – to cut away any possible basis for a persisting entity.[273] We find elsewhere - incompatibly with this – reference to a period of intermediate existence (*antarābhava*) before rebirth. [274] In the later tradition, especially in the Tibetan, this notion becomes important. This would be of no direct concern, were it not that it prompts the conclusion that such diversity of

[269] Op cit. The Pali word, *gandhabba*, is not easily translated, nor is its apparent cognate, Sanskrit *gandharva*. The lexicographers' range of meanings for both is impressive.
[270] There are various accounts in the Upanisads, and the Buddhist account just summarised fits easily beside them. The Upanisadic and later emphasis is on the transmission, not of an individual *ātman*, but of a *sūkṣmaśarīra* (refined or 'shadow' body), a collection of phenomenal elements. See POTTER, Vol.III, p.24ff.
[271] See EKOTTARAGAMA
[272] HARVEY (1) pp.105/08
[273] This is the reunion or rebirth-linking (*paṭisandhi*) brought up often in the *Visuddhimagga*. See Vism [554]and elsewhere; translation p.639.
[274] It is found in the Hinayana school of the Sarvastivada. As this school seems to be contemporary with the Theravada, the view that there is an *antarābhava* cannot be dismissed as a late development, perhaps one which came in under under Brahmanical influence.

view on so significant a point betrays a deeper conceptual uncertainty. This too may suggest that the orthodox view is beyond belief. It certainly seems to suggest that the Buddhists of our period were least sure of their ground when they sought to make out what was involved in claims for rebirth, for all the assurance with which those claims are presented in the record.

51. The Pauline view of rebirth

It may have seemed that the argument of this chapter has led to the conclusion that rebirth is inconceivable, at least if it has to be of a kind to secure the perpetuation of the individual, in such a way as to govern the motivation of action in the present life. Such a conclusion goes too far. There is at least one other account, the orthodox Christian, which is intelligible on its own terms – involving divine action - and which has the merit of it showing what must be the case if claims for rebirth are to stand up. I set out this account, briefly and only for its utility in comparison, as an appendix to this chapter. One conclusion prompted by this might be that St Paul should rank high as a theorist of personal identity. He has at least a clear idea of what is required for persistence, and seeks to satisfy correspondents for whom it is a prime concern.

52. Where the argument stands

It will be helpful if, at this point, I sum up and say where I take the argument to stand, after three chapters in which I have tried to put flesh on the skeleton of the problem, which I have called the identity problem, which I exposed in opening.

The problem is one of two notions of the person, each one problematic in itself and together plainly incompatible. The ‘weak’ notion was set out in brief in Chapter One

and more fully in Chapter Three, in the course of discussing *anātman*. It is counter-intuitive, which need not be decisive against it, and it may be open to the charge of incoherence incidental to all 'reductionist' accounts of the subject and which Butler brought to bear on Locke. Whatever the final judgment on this, the 'weak' notion appears to be unfit for the purpose of grounding the responsibility for the past and the concern for the future which seem to be of the essence of morality. In contrast, in its application to the present life, the 'strong' notion fits with common intuitions. The difficulty comes from the *karman* and rebirth notions from which, on the Buddhist scheme, it is inseparable. For the reasons set out in this chapter, both these notions are problematic, the rebirth-notion conceptually as much as evidentially.

The offer of a solution to the problem of compatibility generated within the Buddhist tradition itself, in effect through understanding the 'strong' notion in terms of the 'weak', does not dispose of it. The presentation of the subject in terms of a 'stream' may realise continuity of a sort – though hardly identity – but not of a kind to ground motivation. The problem is not to be solved by recourse to the two-truths notion, which I have argued in Chapter Three, is evasive in this context. Its obduracy may be seen from the unacceptability to the broad Buddhist tradition of the *Pudgalavādin* offer of a solution. It is from this standpoint that I turn to the question of the helpfulness of Parfit.

APPENDIX TO CHAPTER FOUR

The Christian doctrine of personal survival

St Paul is much the most important of the New Testament writers on the question of personal survival. His letters show that this was a prime concern of many of his first converts, who pleaded for information and reassurance. [275] What he proclaims is the rising of glorified bodies, each one continuous with that of a deceased person.[276] What this amounts to is the continuation of a unique embodiment, secured by divine action. What dies, and nothing else, will come back. The polemical merits of this account will be apparent, in that it seems at least to secure identity. As I have suggested in Chapter Four, this is no small achievement. It is over the details that doubts may come in. St Paul insists (rather than admits) that that which dies is not exactly what continues through being raised. What continues is, rather, a transformation or glorified replica. [277] St Paul takes it for granted that this is, in Parfitian phrase, 'as good as' survival. [278] To minds made sensitive to the distinctions with which we have been concerned, this may seem uncertain.

[275] See, in particular, 1 Thessalonians 4 and 1 Corinthians 15.
[276] Jesus' resurrection is seen as the prototype case of this sequence. Jesus is 'the first fruit of them that sleep' (*aparche ton kekoimemenon*), 1 Corinthians 15.20.
[277] 1 Corinthians 15.35 ff.
[278] In fact, better.

The fully formed Christian position reconciled St Paul's proclamation with the marking out of a place for the soul. It has it that, on death, the body remains where it is, awaiting this resurrection, while the soul undergoes 'the particular judgment', an immediate determination of its destiny. At the Last Day, at the general resurrection, it will be reunited with its body, so that the bliss or agony of a particular fate will have an added bodily dimension. [279] In this way, the various references to the soul in the Gospels were brought into harmony with St Paul's account of the resurrection of the body.

Not all confusions seem to be removed. St Paul seems not to envisage the resurrection of the damned. Yet if the souls of the damned have to be presumed to persist – being immortal - how could they not be in line for reunion with their bodies? There are also references in the Gospels which seen to envisage the continued union of soul and body of at least some deceased in the time before before the Last Day. One such is to the bodily anguish of Dives in the parable to be found in St Luke's Gospel (Ch. 16). If I am right in seeing these difficulties, the Christian scheme may be less than fully coherent, but it has the considerable merit of reflecting an appreciation of what is needed for personal persistence: the continuation of the same body, or of some glorified equivalent of it that assures its identity, along with whatever the soul is taken to contribute to personal identity.

[279] See, for an authority, the latest *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1992, English translation 1994). Protestant orthodoxy would concur, though there have always been dissenters, some arguing that the soul dies with the body, and that the two will be resurrected together. See also the article *Resurrection of the Dead* in the Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church (1957).

CHAPTER FIVE

Can Parfit Help?

53. *Reasons and Persons*

Derek Parfit's *Reasons and Persons* was published in1984. [280] Some of its main contentions were presented earlier in periodical form.[281] Parfit has published nothing since of the same scope, though he has responded to criticism in articles and in public debate. [282] This response has been by way of clarifying his positive assertions and offering minor qualifications. He has also offered fresh argument in rebuttal of criticism. In this chapter, I will be concerned very largely with *Reasons and Persons,* but I will touch on the later work as necessary.

Parts One and Two of *Reasons and Persons* are concerned with 'reasons' – that is, with reasons for acting and, more especially, with reasons for acting in a disinterested way. Part Three, concerned with 'persons', sets out a version of reductionism, concluding with its bearing on morality. [283] Part Four is largely concerned with the claims of the future. My prime concern is with the argument of Part Three, which is almost self-contained, though Parfit makes it plain in the concluding chapter to the whole work why he has chosen to consider reasons and persons together.

At an early point in Part Three, Parfit refers to some work by Strawson and other philosophers, which – though apparently relevant – he does not consider there.[284] It is unclear whether some discussion of Strawson's work in an article published in 1999 should count as the belated consideration left over from 1984, and I will not be dealing

[280] PARFIT (3). I will refer to the slightly amended edition of 1987.
[281] PARFIT (1) and (2)
[282] Notably in PARFIT (4), (5) and (6).
[283] I will refer to Parfit's version of reductionism as 'Reductionism'.
[284] PARFIT (3), p.225. Parfit refers to arguments from Kant, Strawson and Shoemaker: 'Because these arguments are at a very abstract level, I shall hope to discuss them elsewhere'.

with it here.[285] In Parts One and Two, Parfit shows some acquaintance with Buddhism. He appreciates that the Buddhist account of the human subject has a decided resemblance to his own contentions in Part Three, and claims that the resemblance shows that Reductionism is not a complete novelty. With a rare concern not to be found original, he maintains that the Buddha took up an essentially Parfitian position on the person more than two millennia ago. To a modest degree, he claims the Buddha as an ally. My supposition, which is now to be tested, is that this relationship may be reversible. In particular, the view of the subject which I have called the 'weak'notion may draw support from Parfitian arguments. This support may extend to the suggestion of a solution, in whole or in part, to the identity problem.

54. Part Three of *Reasons and Persons*: the Lockean starting-point

Part Three of *Reasons and Persons* finds much, at least, of its grounding in Locke's consideration of personal identity, and I will open with some account of this. [286] Locke's basic insight, and governing principle, is that entities of different kinds have differing conditions of identity. In the case of a living thing, what counts is the organisation of components for the maintenance of a common life. The living thing is individuated by its coming into being at a moment: its track through life preserves its identity through natural changes, and through such likely changes as changes in size. It is on such a conception that Locke grounds his conception of 'a man'.[287] It is to that which I referred above, in urging that the 'becoming' of one living thing by another was unimaginable. [288]

On Locke's scheme of things, 'the person' is to be differentiated in concept from 'the man' - that is, from the living thing, the animal of the species *homo sapiens* - and from 'the soul'. Locke is of course aware that the terms 'man' and 'person' are often found used interchangeably. [289] He is aware, also, that there is something prescriptive about his

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[285] PARFIT (6) p.231 and section vii.
[286] *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*: Chapter 27 of Book II, added to the second edition of 1694. The *Essay* was first published in 1690. See LOCKE.
[287] Locke certainly includes women within the reference of 'a man'. I will follow this usage.
[288]Above p.127ff.
[289] LOCKE, p 340. 'I know that in the ordinary way of speaking, the same Person, and the same Man, stand for one and the same thing. And indeed everyone will always

own use – though only something. His appeal is to what is found in experience, his concern to make sense of experience; a use of the term 'person' with no resonance in daily life would do nothing towards this. In Locke's time, the word is found with a wide, though hardly confusing, application. [290] His use of the term is therefore to be seen as an element in a larger clarification of ideas. [291] Men - or most men – are properly regarded as persons by virtue of their capacity for remembering and also on account of their possession of an attribute, consciousness, which extends to self-consciousness. This is the defining point made more than once in the Chapter:

> …what Person stands for … is a thinking intelligent Being, that has reason and reflection, and can consider it self as self, the same thinking thing in different times and places; which it does only by that consciousness, which is inseparable from thinking, and as it seems to me essential to it …. [292]

These words suggest that 'person' is a classificatory notion: men are normally classed as persons, but exceptionally may not be. [293] The 'empersoned man' is distinguishable from 'the man' in the bald sense. At the same time, a man's personhood has its own identity conditions, grounded on consciousness, both as this stands at a time and as it extends over a period. On Locke's account, 'the person' in this second sense is conceivable as separable from 'the man'. Locke gives instances of such separation, by way of illustrating the concepts 'person' and 'man'. He quotes from a contemporary account of an apparently rational parrot, capable of speech, in order to make the point that this, and

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have a liberty to speak, as he pleases, and to apply what articulate Sounds to what Ideas he thinks fit …'

290 Locke's almost exact contemporary, Samuel Pepys, records his anxiety, after the disasters of the Dutch War, 'whether any violence to this office, or perhaps some severity on our persons [is to be feared]…. though God knows I have in my own person done my full duty I am sure'. *Diary*, 12 June 1667. See PEPYS. Here the first use of 'person' catches the individuals, perhaps also their bodies, as against the collective ('this office') made up of Pepys and his colleagues; the second conveys no more than 'myself'. Elsewhere Pepys refers to his wife's possession of 'a comely person', meaning no more than her body. There is no confusion here, if no great clarity of conception.

291 'Idea' in Locke's sense and in our own looser sense.

292 LOCKE, p.335.

293 Some men will be disabled or traumatised, so that memory, and perhaps also self-consciousness, are lost. These cases present a problem, both in principle and in practice. Can such men be called to account for past crimes?

no more, is what we have: an articulate parrot, not 'a man'. [294] Another instance is the transfer of consciousness – that is, of personhood – between men. The soul of a prince passes into the body of a cobbler, carrying with it the prince's consciousness, superseding, it has to be supposed, what was there before. [295] Here, as with the parrot, animal life persists, and we still have a cobbler – that is, we still have the same man. Equally, the prince's consciousness persists, being a distinct entity. Two identities are in play.

It is easy to imagine extreme cases – that is, developments of the kind where perplexity can be removed, as Mackie suggests, only by a degree of stipulation. [296] Cases to some degree comparable are found in Locke's own account. Consciousness may become infected by delusion. As its transference into another body is conceivable, a particular consciousness may become that of another man. This man might then become liable to the punishment attributable to a consciousness not his 'own'. Here Locke declares that this can be ruled out; that a just God would not permit unmerited bad consequences on any account. [297] The solution of problems by way of divine action brings with it a sense of discomfort. What are the limits of such recourse? Stipulation, also, may be problematic. It will certainly be harder to accept in the case of a living thing than in that of an artefact. A class of living things is resistant to definition along such lines as, 'that is what I am calling [an entity]'. A living thing – a mouse, a man, a person – seems just to be or not to be, and not to be determinable by decision. This recalcitrance comes to mind when we come up against difficulties with the notion of personal identity.

A more difficult question is that of how persons come into being. What can be said with relative safety is that what Locke calls the 'appropriation' of consciousness is what he takes to be a vital part of it, and that response to pleasure and pain – that is, attraction and recoil – goes with this process. [298] This should remind us strongly of what was said

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[294] LOCKE p.333
[295] Op cit p.340
[296] MACKIE (1) pp.144/45. Mackie concludes, 'This lends some plausibility to Hume's claim that identity is a fiction'.
[297] LOCKE pp.338 & 344.
[298] LOCKE p.346. MARTIN & BARRESI, p 21. Martin and Barresi go on to an inconclusive discussion of whether Locke took persons to be substances. 'One of the most puzzling aspects … is that of determining his view of the ontological status of persons' (p 24).

above about *asmimāna*. Much of the thrust of the *anātman*-doctrine is against delusory attachment – that is, against self-construction. This seems to resemble what Locke is describing. Locke, of course, sees nothing objectionable.

The example of the prince and the cobbler also brings out Locke's discrimination of 'person' and 'soul'. On the tabulation set out in Chapter Three, Locke's soul can be seen to be both the animating factor and the pure spiritual substance; it is attributable singly to each human being and its loss is death. It is distinguishable from the soul of Homer, that which is both animating factor and shadow- body, escaping on death and capable of being restored to a degree of substantiality in the Underworld.[299] It is also distinguishable from the soul that can be good or bad, corrupt or incorrupt – that is, the soul of Plato's myths. The entity open to judgment, as Plato's soul is open to judgment, can only be what Locke calls 'the person'. Here is a point of prime importance: the notion of the person is 'a Forensick Term'; it is one that marks out the subject's liability to judgment and punishment. [300]

Locke's soul appears to have the capacity to pass from one body to another in its conveyance of consciousness. [301] Beyond this, it is almost redundant. If animation were to be understood differently, no explanatory function would remain to it. It may well be that Locke saw this. It was not open to him, as a Christian, simply to dispense with a conception so prominent in his conceptual inheritance. In respect of its near-redundancy, the Lockean soul resembles the *ātman*. My treatment of the Buddhist assertion of *anātman* should have brought this out: *ātman*, on the Buddhist view, whether or not ontologically inseparable from *brahman*, is too pure to be useful. What matters, on the Buddhist view, is the entity formed by *karman*. Once this entity, along with consciousness, is taken to need no conveyance between one life and another, but to proceed by itself, the *ātman* of Brahmanical postulation will be redundant. As we have seen, the Buddhists would add that it is also a damaging postulate.

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[299] In the Underworld this may regain enough corporeality to be recognisable by those not yet dead. Odysseus' experience (*Odyssey* XI) is an instance of this.
[300] LOCKE, p 346
[301] Op cit p.340

Martin and Barresi offer a comprehensive treatment of the reception of Locke's account, presenting it as one of the 'naturalization of the soul'. [302] Talk of 'naturalization' seems not to bring out the break with tradition – the Western tradition – represented by the Lockean person. This is not so much a soul differently conceived, or otherwise refigured ('naturalized'); it is a seemingly novel entity. Martin and Barresi are, however, justified in taking the development of Locke's notion over the course of the Eighteenth Century as inviting the description of 'naturalization'. For many of the writers of this period, the 'person' had become both subject and soul-substitute, and the prospect of its instability and possible dissolubility was alarming. Martin and Barresi pick out an apprehension that if the permanence secured by the soul-notion were to come into question, there would be nothing that made for security. There is a parallel here with the Buddhist experience, and I will return to it in my concluding chapter.

55. Parfit's starting-point: 'We are not what we believe'

Parfit develops Locke's analysis further, drawing out what was only implicit. We may however be struck by his lack of attention to Locke's careful discriminations. The discrimination of 'man', 'person' and 'soul' makes up much of the burden of Locke's chapter and I have emphasised it accordingly. We are not always sure which of these Parfit is talking about. [303] He offers an account more crisply argued which – it may be – brings weaknesses attaching to Locke's whole approach into sharper relief. My use of Parfit will be for my own purposes, and I make no attempt to give a complete account of Part Three. This could be done only at considerable length. My object is to see if the components of a solution to the identity problem may be found by way of appropriation of what Parfit offers. My account will be no fuller than this object requires.

There has been some lively discussion of personal identity over the last half-century. Some papers by Bernard Williams were at the centre of this. [304] I will touch on this discussion, as I need to, in the course of this chapter and the next. Shoemaker's example of Robinson and Brown should be mentioned now, for its importance.[305] Shoemaker

302 See Bibliography.
303 PARFIT(3) p.205
304 Contained in WILLIAMS B(1).
305 SHOEMAKER(1) pp.23-25. Also WIGGINS p.206.

imagines an experiment in brain-removal and replacement where, through inadvertence, Brown's brain is put into Robinson's emptied skull, Robinson's brain not surviving. Now we have 'Brownson'. How far is Brownson the continuation of Brown? If Locke is Parfit's original stimulus, it is from this now well-known example that we seem to have his immediate starting-point.

Parfit's intervention will be of a kind to reorder the terms on which the debate over personal identity had been conducted. He opens by distinguishing the questions of a person and of personal identity over time. Shortly, he will advance a view subversive of common and natural assumptions: 'We are not what we believe'. The person, the subject of debate, will be 'reduced', so as to end its central importance. McDowell, in an article to which I will return, catches Parfit's polemical purpose in a few words: '… this 'inner' aspect of personal persistence should be understood in terms of relations between psychological states and events that are intelligible independently of personal identity'. [306]

I quote the opening of Parfit's first conclusion, for which he will argue at length, from the end of the first chapter of Part Three:

> We are not separately existing entities, apart from our brains and bodies, and various interrelated physical and mental events. Our existence just involves the existence of our brains and bodies, and the doing of our deeds, and the thinking of our thoughts, and the occurrence of certain other physical and mental events …

On the first topic, the nature of the person, he has already declared:

> … to be a person, a being must be self-conscious, aware of its identity and its continued existence over time. [307]

[306] DANCY p.230.
[307] PARFIT(3) pp.216 & 202.

With this, he considers what identity over time ‘necessarily involves or consists in’.[308] He summarises what he calls ‘the standard view’, in its application to objects. Here identity over time is secured by physical continuity: the thing is the same thing because it goes on.[309] From this he derives ‘the Physical Criterion’ of personal identity, first stated as: ‘the physical continuity, over time, of my brain and body’. We may note a certain oddity in this formula. The brain is spoken of as if <u>other</u> than the body, not as part of it. This is not, however, the version Parfit offers, judging the following better:

> X today is one and the same person as Y at some past time if and only if (2) enough of Y’s brain continued to exist, and is now X’s brain, and (3) the physical continuity has not taken a ‘branching’ form. (4) Personal identity over time just consists in the holding of facts like (2) and (3) [310]

In sum, the Physical Criterion requires the persistence of (enough of the) brain, making no mention of (the rest of the) body. The decisive role accorded the brain must reflect the view that it carries what is vital for identity. This is Shoemaker’s assumption. It will be spelled out some pages later; it could not be introduced earlier without anticipating what will be said in justification of ‘the Psychological Criterion’. [311]

It is to the Psychological Criterion that Parfit proceeds. On a possible view, this involves the continued existence of a soul or spiritual substance. This is by no means what Parfit is concerned to assert. What he offers is a subtler version of Locke’s claim that personal identity is to be found in experience-memory. [312] This is broadened to cover psychological connections other than memory. [313] He does not instance karmic

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308 Op cit p.202

309 Op cit p.203/4. Parfit accepts of course that this may be through appreciable change.

310 Op cit p.204.

311 Parfit remarks a bit later: ‘The continued existence of a person’s brain is at least part of the normal cause of psychological continuity’. Op cit p.208

312 PARFIT p.205

313 Op cit p.208: ‘Though it is memory that makes us aware of our own continued existence over time, the various other continuities have great importance. We may believe that they have enough importance to provide personal identity even in the absence of memory’

connection as one of these, despite what we will see to be his – limited - familiarity with *karman*, but this appears to be something of the sort which he envisages. [314] He also distinguishes psychological connectedness and psychological continuity. Connectedness is the holding of particular direct psychological connections; continuity is the holding of overlapping chains of strong connectedness.[315]. The distinction is plainly pitched to meet the points of contemporary critics of Locke's original formula. On such analysis is founded a statement of the Psychological Criterion:

> X today is one and the same person as Y at some past time if and only if (2) X is psychologically continuous with Y, (3) this continuity has the right kind of cause, and (4) it has not taken a 'branching' form. (5) Personal identity over time just consists in the holding of facts like (2) to (4). [316]

There follows discussion of 'the right kind of cause'. This may be the normal cause, any reliable cause or <u>any</u> cause. Where it is the normal cause, taken to be a state of the brain, the two Criteria will largely coincide. [317] The admissibility of the other two causes will be much to the point when we consider Buddhist notions of continuity.
The Psychological Criterion is the more demanding of the two: the continuity of the brain, or of enough of it, is necessary but not sufficient; the other conditions, just spelled out, need to be met.

<u>56. Reductionism</u>

It is notable that these Criteria are the only two brought into consideration. Both are found to be 'Reductionist'. Here is a term that smacks of wide application. Parfit sets

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314 I touch on Parfit's understanding of *karman* in treating of Part Two of *Reasons and Persons* below.

315 The distinction between these two is developed at length. Connectedness is simpler: X is Y if X now remembers having the experiences of Y twenty years ago. There is continuity if, even in the absence of such direct memory-connectedness, there is the connection made by overlapping chains. For instance, at its simplest, X remembers the experience of Z, part of which was memory of the experience of Y. Continuities may be extended in number and elaborated in nature. PARFIT (3) p.206

316 PARFIT(3) p.207

317 Op cit p.208

out with an evident carefulness what he will take Reductionism to be: applied to personal identity, Reductionism is the view that the continuity of persons is to be explained in terms of events. Here is the first defining claim:

> the fact of a person's identity over time just consists in the holding of certain more particular facts.

The other claim follows from it:

> these facts can be described without either presupposing the identity of this person, or explicitly claiming that the experiences in this person's life are had by this person, or even explicitly claiming that this person exists. These facts can be described in an impersonal way. [318]

Parfit now proceeds to explain and to sketch a defence of 'Reductionism'. His method is by way of the drawing of a succession of fine distinctions. Reductionism, as Parfit conceives it, is not a simple position and its characteristic assertions cover a range of possible positions. Parfit claims that all Reductionists would accept:

> (3) A person's existence just consists in the existence of a brain and body, and the occurrence of a series of interrelated physical and mental events. [319]

Some would claim (4) and others (5):

> (4) A person just is a particular brain and body, and such a series of interrelated events.

> (5) A person is an entity that is distinct from a brain and body, and such a series of events.

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[318] PARFIT(3) p.210

[319] PARFIT(3) p.211. For ease of reference I follow Parfit's numberings.

Parfit expands on (5): ' … a person is not merely a composite object … A person is an entity that has a brain and body …But though (5) is true, a person is not a separately existing entity. Though (5) is true, (3) is also true'. Parfit sees that this claim is difficult to credit, and bolsters it with a reference to the case of a nation, at once just its citizens and territory and also an entity distinct from these.

Parfit proceeds to other, related, claims. One such is:

> (9) Though persons exist, we could give a complete description of reality without claiming that persons exist.

It seems that the words 'we could', just quoted, are to be taken literally: we do not have to do this and will not commonly choose to do so. Parfit goes on:

> We can describe this fact by claiming either
>
> (10) that there exists a particular brain and body, and a particular series of interrelated physical and mental events,
>
> or
>
> (11) that a particular person exists.

He sums up: 'If (10) and (11) are two ways of describing the same fact, a complete description need not make both claims'. [320] He sees that (11) will go with (5). Their joint assertion seems to go beyond (10). Parfit sees no real difference: '… Claim (10) may imply claim (11)…… if we know that (10) is true, we shall know that (11) is true'. [321]

[320] PARFIT (3) p.212
[321] Op cit p.213

I dealt in Chapter Three with the Buddhist conception of the subject, on the account of it most frequently found.[322] Five *skandāḥ* are taken to compose the human subject: corporeality (*rūpa*) and four 'psychological' concomitants. All five are open to be understood in terms of happening rather than substance. Memory is a main element within the process, but no more than with Parfit is it the sole constituent. To describe the totality is to describe the association of a conditioned corporeality with conditioned events, at once transient and of great complexity. Each element within the complex is what it is because of what has gone before, whether this is internal to the subject or by way of impact from outside. Here we have the implicit denial, by way of redundancy, of the substantial subject. It is complementary to what is explicit in the texts and their commentaries.

Set out formally, with a view to explaining personal continuity, the closeness of the Buddhist conception to what is caught by the Psychological Criterion may be evident:

> X today is one and the same person as Y at some past time if and only if (2) X and Y are connected by an unbroken flow of corporeal and mental experience, (3) this flow has the right kind of conditioning, extending to karmic conditioning, and (4) there does not exist a different person who is also so connected with Y. Personal identity over time just consists in the holding of facts like (2) to (4).

This formulation could, no doubt, be refined. It should be enough, as it is, to justify the claim that the Buddhist conception seems closely comparable to that of Parfit's Reductionism. This part of *Reasons and Persons* should be open to appropriation in support of the Buddhist conception.

57. Indeterminacy

[322] It should be recalled also that this is not the only possible account. I have dealt above (section 24) with an analysis of experience (conceptual and perceptual) in terms of the *dhātavaḥ*. Other such analyses are available.

Parfit takes Indeterminacy to go with Reductionism. He claims that it may be an empty question whether B at time-2 is the same person as A at time-1. All the facts of the matter may be agreed and available, yet opposing views on the point might each be sustainable. He illustrates this claim by instancing a club that goes out of existence, and a club that is formed – or re-formed - with the same name and objects after an interval. It is an empty question, he suggests, whether we have one club or two. The point could no doubt be settled by stipulation, just as the same doubt bearing on a physical object could be settled. The physical object seems open to stipulation with little difficulty ('This is what I am calling an X'), which is not to say that stipulation has no limits. In contrast, natural kinds, and more especially human beings, seem resistant to stipulation. They are what they are, and it is a secondary matter what we choose to call them. Parfit is, therefore, decidedly bold in claiming that the identity even of people may to be open to be found indeterminate. Part Three opens with the imaginary case of Teletransportation. By way of some 'scanning' process, someone on Earth is copied in every physical and psychological respect; the copy is then transmitted to Mars, there to be realised in flesh and blood. On one variant of the case, the 'original' on Earth is destroyed by the copying-process. On another, the 'original' survives. In this second case, the process of copying and transmission results in the co-existence of two beings, indistinguishable at least initially. If the 'original' then dies after a short interval, is there a going-on of the person that he was? The question may be answerable – in the sense that an answer might have to be imposed. In the context of an argument at law, a judge might have to answer it. But here we see the limitations of stipulation. Parfit's view of the question as 'empty' may seem persuasive in the light of these limitations. Its appeal may seem enhanced when discussion shifts from 'how things are' to 'what matters'. [323]

Parfit offers supporting arguments later in Part Three. He postulates two 'spectra' - that is, ranges of states of affairs, each successive state being distinct from the one before it to a regular degree. One covers a range of physical, the other of psychological, possibilities. In each case, a subject is taken to be at one end of a spectrum, and made to undergo successive changes: the body may be changed bit by bit, and so may the memory-store, the character and other components of personhood. At the far end, after the totality of these changes, there will be a subject sharply distinct from its forerunner. In each case, we may still entertain the idea of the same entity severely changed. The

[323] PARFIT (3), pp.199-200

conjunction of these two makes up a third, the 'Combined Spectrum'. Around the middle of this one, after substantial changes, both physical and psychological, it must be a question what subject we have. At just what moment does the change of identity come about? Even if we cannot detect it, must we suppose that there has to be such a moment? It is Parfit's point that conceding the indeterminacy of such a case is at least a less vulnerable position than is the arbitrariness of any evident alternative. We can say that in such a case, with all the facts being known, and faced with A or with B, the choice between declaring 'A' or 'B' will be random or whimsical. To avoid this, we can take it to be an open question whether it is A or B. In the light of such an example, Parfit invites us to grant that the identity of persons is not always determinate. [324]

I know of nothing in the Buddhist tradition amounting to a discussion of Indeterminacy on anything like Parfit's terms. The logic of assertions supporting the Buddhist form of reductionism may indeed be such as to point to it. Parfit has no need to consider this possibility, which may be implied by his conclusion: 'There are some people who believe that our identity must be determinate, though they do not believe that we are separately existing entities, distinct from our brains and bodies, and our experiences. This view I believe to be indefensible' [325] If Parfit is right here, it might be a point against the Buddhist tradition if its advocates were to be found among those who accept an argument and then blink at its plain implications.

I distinguished above between 'strong' and 'weak' notions of the subject and have since pointed out the considerable difficulties in holding to the 'strong' view in understanding such claims as 'At that time Sariputta was X'. It must be a question whether the 'weak' view implies that the subject it picks out should be counted as determinate in its identity. The weakness of the 'weak' view – its presentation of a flow of elements in constant flux - might suggest it does not. The view is, at the same time, one of a stream, which must be counted as one stream of indisputable identity. Here, it seems, the line of thought prompted by Parfit brings out difficulties more than it suggests their solution.

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[324] In this paragraph I have summarised an argument of much complexity. Much detail has had to be left aside. I suggest a reference to Chapter 11 of *Reasons & Persons*.

[325] PARFIT(3) p.239

58. Memory and Quasi-memory: the charge of circularity

Parfit's case, with its grounding in Locke, may be vulnerable to Butler's celebrated criticism of Locke. This is to the effect that Locke presupposes what he takes himself to establish:

> …. one should really think it self-evident, that consciousness of personal identity presupposes, and therefore cannot constitute personal identity, any more than knowledge, in any other case, can constitute truth which it presupposes. [326]

Otherwise put, Butler's point is that remembering presupposes identity. When I remember, I remember that I (a continuing 'I') did or suffered such-and-such; I cannot otherwise suppose myself to be remembering.

Parfit aims to deflect this criticism by restating his account of the person in terms of 'quasi-memory'. In practice I do not have, but I might conceivably have, quasi-memories. Parfit explains:

> I have an accurate quasi-memory of a past experience if
>
> (1) I seem to remember having an experience,
>
> (2) someone did have this experience, and
>
> (3) my apparent memory is causally dependent, in the right kind of way, on that past experience. [327]

Quasi-memory was already part of the philosophical currency at the time of *Reasons and Persons*. Parfit's account is close to that of Shoemaker, though less elaborately

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[326] PERRY p.100
[327] PARFIT (3), p.220

marked out. [328] In Parfit's presentation, quasi-memory is given a touch of plausibility by being accounted for in terms of brain-scanning. For the purposes of Parfit's argument, this is enough; the notion needs to be no more than conceivable. He goes on:

> There is strong connectedness of quasi-memory if, over each day, the number of direct quasi-memory connections is at least half the number in most actual lives. Overlapping strands of strong connectedness provide continuity of quasi-memory. Revising Locke, we claim that the unity of each person's life is in part created by this continuity. We are not now appealing to a concept that presupposes personal identity. Since the continuity of quasi-memory does not presuppose personal identity, it may be part of what constitutes personal identity. [329]

Putting the point in other words, I need not assume that the so-called memories which I find myself to have (Parfit's quasi-memories) are all 'my' memories. In default of this assumption, I am not taking for granted what I purport to vindicate. 'My' memories will be a sub-set of the total of quasi-memories - commonly, indeed, 100% of the total. Free from this assumption, I can see my identity as made up in part by this total, without the circularity which Butler attributes to Locke.

Parfit seems to assume that, on its own terms, Butler's objection is decisive. It follows that quasi-memory, or something like it, has to be postulated if a Lockean account of the person is to be sustained. If it cannot be sustained, it cannot be the object of Parfitian reduction. The Buddhist-advocate therefore has an interest in the notion being sustainable.

There appears to be a Buddhist parallel. The 'fruiting' of *karman* may be seen as the 'invasion' of my consciousness and memory-chain by an item of quasi-memory. I may suffer or enjoy the consequences of a deed done before my present life – or life

[328] SHOEMAKER (2)
[329] PARFIT (3) p.222

'downstream' – in something of the way in which I might have the memory – Parfit's example – of a holiday I never took. We may also recall the notion of knowledge-from-the-recollection-of-previous-dwellings/lives (*pubbenivāsānusatiñāña*). [330] The Buddha says, on occasion, 'At that time I was Y'. Such recollection may be part of the consciousness of a living person in the same way as quasi-memory. It will be (to quote Parfit) 'causally dependent, in the right kind of way' on the experience of an earlier living person. The notion of quasi-memory, if we accept it, seems at least to make *pubbenivāsānusatiñāña* less far-fetched.

59. The subject of experience: alternatives to Reductionism

From this, Parfit moves on to consider whether we have direct awareness of a subject of experience and a persistent one. This consideration opens up a broader consideration. He quotes from Reid:

> Whatever this self may be, it is something which thinks, and deliberates, and resolves, and acts, and suffers. I am not thought, I am not action, I am not feeling. I am something that thinks, and acts, and suffers. [331]

Parfit comments: 'In one sense, this is clearly true'. To show what he means, he distinguishes two assertions: one that 'a person is the subject of experiences'; one that 'the subject of experiences is a separately existing entity'. It is the former which is 'clearly true'.

The distinction is one with which the mainstream Buddhist tradition is concordant. We saw that in the response of Buddhist orthodoxy to the characteristic assertions of the

330 Section 50 above
331 PARFIT(3) p.223. For Reid's words, see PERRY p.109.

Pudgalavada, well expressed in the appraisal of Vasubandhu, in his distinction between what is established substantially and what is established conceptually. [332] What is established conceptually may be described as substantially grounded (*dravyasiddha*), its grounding, in the case of the subject, being the *skandhāḥ*. The *skandhāḥ* are a collection of processes, embracing Reid's instances of thinking, deliberating, resolving, acting and suffering. What Parfit regards as 'clearly true' is the assertion that there is a person, not 'a separately existing entity', who is the subject. This seems closely comparable to the conceptual entity, 'substantially grounded', of Vasubandhu's account, both in what it is and in what it is not. Parfit's argument seems open to enlistmen in its support.

Parfit offers a review of what the alternatives to Reductionism might be. These come down to two, and the argument proceeds by way of exposing the difficulties in the way of subscribing to either. One is the so-called 'further fact' view. What this view amounts to is hardly made clear on its introduction: no doubt, it is part of Parfit's point that it cannot be made clear. Later on, it is brought up in a way which at least brings out its point:

> We cannot defensibly believe that our identity involves a further fact, unless we also believe that we are separately existing entities, distinct from our brains and bodies. And we cannot defensibly believe that our identity must be determinate, unless we believe that the existence of these separate entities must be all-or-nothing.[333]

This seems a decisive objection if we are ready to grant that Parfit has disposed of all-or-nothingness and determinacy. By way of reinforcement, his method is to ask questions - 'just what?','how?', and 'where is it?' - and to remark on weak answers. Here, by implication, is his answer to Reid, developed at length, if not directly so attributed.

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332 See section 32 above.

333 PARFIT(3) p.240

Parfit has rather more regard for the other alternative, what he calls the ‘Cartesian’ view. He takes this to come in two versions. As first presented, it appears to be the postulate of a spiritual substance –one, no doubt, for every living human being – persistent at least through the present existence and capable of sustaining elements of the ‘inner’ life of that thing, notably memories. It must be taken to be unique and so to confer identity. Parfit leaves some such account as this to be inferred from the example he gives of a Japanese woman remembering living a life as a Celtic hunter and warrior in the Bronze Age. It should be possible to say what might count as evidence of this life, and what might tend to establish it as the woman’s previous life. He accepts – at least for the sake of argument – the intelligibility of this view – and rejects it on the grounds that there is no evidence for it: ‘ .. there <u>might</u> have been evidence supporting the Cartesian View’. (My emphasis) [334]

The other version, brought in just after this, is treated less kindly. Parfit says, ‘Some who believe in Cartesian Egos do not connect them .. to observable facts’. When this is the case, he suggests, nothing can be known; it seems to follow that nothing had better be asserted. The difference between the two versions comes out from Parfit’s discussion of his ‘Combined Spectrum’. Parfit takes the Cartesian ego of the first version to be such as to drop out of existence once the destruction of its concomitant and brain-based psychological elements has reached a certain point. Nothing of the sort is supposed in the case of the second version, there being no such concomitance. He concludes, ‘When the belief in Cartesian Egos is in this way cut loose from any connections with either publicly observable or privately introspectible facts, the charge that it is unintelligible becomes more plausible’. [335]

There is another point, which may tell against both alternatives. Parfit suggests that awareness of being a subject – even if found – falls short of what is required, if this is awareness of being a <u>persistent</u> subject. Why not a succession of subjects? ‘Memories might be passed from one to the next like a baton in a relay race’[336]. Parfit criticises this as being an instance of the possibility envisaged (and disparaged) by Locke and Kant: ‘.. the Cartesian Ego that I am might suddenly cease to exist and be replaced by

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[334] Op cit p.227
[335] PARFIT(3) p.228
[336] Op cit p.223

another Ego. This new Ego might 'inherit' all of my psychological characteristics, as in a relay race.' Understandably, Parfit thinks this hardly worth discussing.

The 'reincarnation' described by Parfit in the context of considering his 'Cartesian' view is not that of Buddhist doctrine, which, as we have seen, is one of persistence of a kind not attributable to a spiritual substance. His discussion of it bears on Buddhist concerns only where it presents the Cartesian Ego as lacking any significant application. The Cartesian Ego – on Parfit's view of it– is to all appearances the *ātman* of Brahmanical religion or the *puruṣa* of the *Sāṃkhya* school. I touched in passing on these conceptions in Chapter Three. They are barely distinguishable: the *ātman* more a 'divine spark', the *puruṣa* more 'pure consciousness'. In the case of all three, it seems fair to say that the notion is too pure to be useful. What is surprising, therefore, is that Parfit even envisages its vital association with particular memories. He seems to concede more to his supposed opponent than he needs to, in granting that there might have been evidence to lead us to credit this 'Cartesian ego'.

Here we should recall the near-redundancy of the soul, on Locke's view of it. Parfit goes beyond Locke in offering reinforcement to the case against the *ātman*, and so support for the vital Buddhist assertion of *anātman*. The similarity of style of argument is notable, leaning in each case on the non-necessity of the notion criticised and so, explicitly or not, on its uselessness as a postulate. It follows – so goes the argument – that what is apparent, a stream of events, is the only remaining basis for an account of the subject. In Chapter Three I judged that the *anātman*-notion was good philosophy, if not central to consideration of the identity problem. Parfit's discussion supports that claim.

60. The mattering of Relation R

Parfit has been concerned with how things are in the case of persons, and with the needfulness and coherence of the concepts brought to bear. There follows a move from consideration of 'how things are' to that of 'what matters', the shift in significance fitting well with the claim that identity may be indeterminate. The claim is now that:

> Personal identity is not what matters. I claim what matters is Relation R: psychological connectedness and/or continuity with the right kind of cause. Since it is more controversial, I add, as a separate claim: the right kind of cause could be any cause. [337]

In making this claim for Relation R, Parfit relies in large part on arguments already advanced, with their steady subversion of the notion of personal identity. Any other account is found to be less plausible. The case of 'Division' enforces this. [338] Division occurs when the physical continuity which is the normal cause of psychological continuity is disrupted and, after a fashion, perpetuated. An example would be the transference, by means of surgery, of my two brain-hemispheres into the skulls of my two triplet brothers. [339] Do I persist through the continued life of both, or through that of either one, or through that of neither? We can see that the question is both, 'Do I go on? and 'Do I go on?. A clear-cut answer to the first question, bearing on identity, will, Parfit judges, be elusive. What sound like identity-claims may be uttered, but they should be understood to rest on perpetuation-claims, by way of Relation-R. The answer to the second question, that of perpetuation, will be Yes.

These perpetuation-claims may be illustrated by bringing out their application to particular cases. Assume the simplest case, that of supposed continuity across one lifespan. I opened by saying that the *skandha*-account of the subject, the 'weak' view, with its suggestion of perpetual flux, may be hard to square with this. If the question of identity is to be laid aside, and that of mattering to replace it, our claim will become one of the obtaining of Relation R. In the simplest case it can be assumed that the right kind of cause will obtain, here the normal cause, the persistence of a brain and body. If our concern is 'mattering', we may be happy to accept the *skandha*-account, disregard its difficulties, and find to 'matter' such connections and/or continuities as memories or – as much to the point in the Buddhist sphere – such lines of cause-and-effect as the cultivation of patience at one time and its realisation at another.

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337 PARFIT(3)p.215

338 Op cit, ch.12, especially p.254

339 It is no part of Parfit's case that this is practicable, or that it ever will be practicable. All that the argument requires is that it is conceivable.

The Buddhist advocate's claim that continuity obtains across lifetimes takes us beyond the normal cause. This claim cannot be based on bodily continuity. It needs, therefore, to be grounded otherwise, and Parfit's 'separate claim', if we accept it, should make it at least conceivable. It might, on the Buddhist view, be the case that X's cultivation of patience bears fruit in the life of Sariputta. It is just such instances – that is, non-trivial ones – that draw forth the Buddha's declarations as to how things are. This one, in particular, may seem difficult to accept.

On the Parfitian scheme of things, causes other than the normal cause are at least conceivable. The claim, 'At that time Sariputta was X', may be acceptable if what we take to matter – and we are concerned with 'mattering' - is Relation R. On this view, when the Buddha is recorded as saying, 'At that time Sariputta was X', he should be taken to mean that Relation R obtains between X and Sariputta. This relationship may be one of memory; it may be one of intention and its fulfilment and – of especial significance – of the working out of *karman*, here barely distinguishable from intention. This last point is not, of course, Parfit's but it seems a fair extension of his claim.

At a later stage in the argument, Parfit draws on some discussion by Nagel, offered from a different standpoint. On a view derived from this, Relation-R runs on through successive embodiments and is to be seen as the thread along which a succession of 'series-persons' is extended. [340] Each one of these can be taken to be related through continuity and connectedness to those going before it. With the obtaining of the normal cause, bodily continuity, they enjoy relatively strong connection and continuity over the course of one life. In the case of successive lives, with a cause abnormal in Parfitian terms, this connection and continuity will be less but still existent.

The notion of series-persons may be regarded as a speculative extension of Parfit's main argument. By way of expounding the notion, Parfit explains

> It may help to remember a mythical being: a phoenix. On the criterion of the identity of birds, a bird ceases to exist if it is burnt to ashes. If a phoenix existed, it would not be a particular bird. It would be a series of

[340] PARFIT(3) p.289ff.

> birds, or a series-bird. A phoenix would at any time have the body of a particular bird. But when this bird is burnt to ashes, only the bird ceases to exist. The phoenix comes to life again in the body of a new bird, rising from the ashes. Like a particular series-person, a particular phoenix would thus have a series of different bodies……… There are many series-persons. These sentences are being typed by a series-person, me. They are also being typed by a person: old-me. This person is named Derek Parfit. I, the series-person, hereby name myself Phoenix Parfit. Since my present body is also Derek Parfit's body, both of us are typing these sentences…..[Old-I might be killed] but it would not kill me, the series-person. [341]

The Buddhist-advocate will observe that, to all appearances, the 'series-person' is a personification of the karmic entity. The conception is one which makes more vivid, perhaps more intelligible, even more plausible, the Buddhist notion of conditioned rebirth. To that extent, it seems that Parfit's partially speculative offering is a support for Buddhist claims.

This support may also be effective in reverse. The notion of series-persons stands to be strengthened by association with the *karman*-notion. *Karman* is a connecting factor, its process being one of intention and consequence, whether or not the intention is realised. It is an instance of connection rather than of continuity, and is claimed by the Buddhist tradition to obtain over long periods (I suffer now, perhaps in a striking way, for the sensational crime committed in a previous embodiment). [342] There is, however, a qualification. Parfit suggests that relations of direct connectedness will be less strong and frequent with time, and the significance of Relation R will tend to diminish. For this reason, thinks Parfit, not on account of the mere passage of time, I may rationally care less about my future. For the Buddhist tradition this will emphatically not be the case:

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[341] PARFIT (3) pp.290/91

[342] It is an instance of connection because it is not transitive.

the 'fruiting' of *karman*, on the traditional view, may be very far in the future. Recall the case of Purṇa, discussed in Chapter Four. [343] Here is an important point of difference.

Parfit's account of 'what matters' – Relation R – seems to point to a solution to the problem of the intelligibility of persistence through death. The Buddhist advocate should find it easy to follow Parfit in understanding the 'identity' of X and Sariputta as amounting to the obtaining of Relation R. He can remind himself of Buddhaghosa's words, 'neither the same, nor different', for the relation between the two. Relation R will not, in this case, have its normal cause, X being long dead and his brain having been long past serving as the carrier of continuity. Parfit's argument now becomes useful, as it extends to any cause. The Buddhist advocate, talking to the converted, will present personal continuity in terms of *karman*. Talking to the unconverted, he must claim that it is just one of the facts of the matter that Relation R can pertain in the absence of bodily continuity. All Parfit's arguments are open to enlistment in support of this claim.

61. Impersonal description

In *Reasons and Persons*, Parfit claimed, in his own – later – words,

> that we could fully redescribe our lives without referring to ourselves, or explicitly claiming that we exist. This we can call the impersonal redescription claim or IRC. [344]

This claim is to be found, otherwise expressed, in section 56 above, in my account of Reductionism. In an article published in 1999, Parfit withdraws it, observing that 'though IRC is a natural way to express Reductionism, it added little to my account, and is open to various objections'. [345] I need not enlarge here on these objections, as Parfit's qualification seems hardly to weaken the support which his case, if made out, gives to

[343] Section 43 above
[344] PARFIT (6) p.221
[345] PARFIT (6) p.222

essential Buddhist positions. What, in contrast, seems relevant to the holding of such positions is his advancement of a comparable claim, in the same article, in response to McDowell. This is to the effect that we can conceive of an impersonal scheme no worse than ours (INW). In the next chapter, in the course of reviewing McDowell's remarks, I will consider how far Parfit's presentation of INW is persuasive. Here, I can only say what it amounts to.

Parfit's object is to show

> that we can coherently imagine thinkers who could understand the facts to which a Reductionist account appeals, even though they did not have the concept of a person, or the wider concept of a subject of experiences. [346]

In other words, it would be coherent to think about experiences without thinking that these experiences have subjects. This is to be distinguished from the claim that it would be coherent to think that some experiences might not have subjects. To the extent that Parfit's demonstration is persuasive, we should be left satisfied that we could have understood the Reductionist account before we acquired the concept of a person. [347]

Parfit's argument proceeds by way of examples, and is resistant to summary. An example to which I shall return bears on our understanding of someone's – or no-person's – climbing of a mountain:

> Where … Tenzing climbed Everest, they [Parfit's thinkers] would claim that in Tenzing – that is in the sequence with that name – there was a climbing of Everest. This sequence does not itself climb Everest; nor does its associated

[346] PARFIT (6) p.221
[347] Op cit pp.228/30

body. Rather, this sequence includes a climbing, achieved with this body. [348]

Though Parfit's assumption is that his imaginary beings, resembling ourselves in every other respect, have yet to acquire the person-concept, his account seems open to expropriation by those who urge that we should be ready to give up the concept or, at least sit light to it. Here, I have in mind such commentators as the author of the *Milindapañḥa.* We are also reminded of the observations of the *bhikkhunī,* Vajira. [349] Parfit seems to be offering, by way of his INW, a detailed spelling-out of what we have found on those occasions. He remarks of his imagined beings: '… instead of "I am angry," they would say, "Anger has arisen here."' [350]

Having mentioned the 1999 article, I should make it plain that I do not see it as a retraction. It contains the important modification just mentioned but is, in general, an extended defence. It does however offer a mapping-out of various understandings of the subject, which allows Parfit to place his own account in relation to others less thoroughly reductionist and to those of two other writers, which he takes to be 'hyper-reductionist'. He also presents the Buddha as being less a support from the side as also a 'hyper-reductionist' or eliminativist. [351] There are also some other restatements, which Parfit seems to offer as clarification only, but which I take to be fresh expressions of his argument, which leave it further from its starting point in Locke.

62. Liberating

In *Reasons and Persons*, Parfit goes on to appraise the credibility – in one sense - of the position for which he has argued – that is, its capacity to become part of the beliefs underlying day-to-day living. There is a distinction between this and the finding of no decisive arguments against a contention. As Parfit has quite often taken up this negative stance, the point is a real one. He says, candidly, that he does not always find the view for which he has argued fully believable; at some level there will always be doubts.[352]

[348] Op cit p.229
[349] See section 35 above.
[350] PARFIT (6) p.229
[351] PARFIT(6) p.260
[352] PARFIT(3), p.279. I discussed another instance of this kind of 'incredibility' with reference to rebirth. See above.

This does not stop him recording, a little later, that he finds his conclusions 'liberating'. He goes on to describe an enlargement of human concern: 'Other people are closer. I am less concerned about the rest of my own life, and more concerned about the lives of others'. [353] His summing-up of this change of view as 'liberating' strikes a happily Buddhist note: 'liberation' (*mokṣa*) is synonymous with the attainment of Nirvana. Parfit's complex reaction will, indeed, come as no surprise to the Buddhist: the teaching on the self is perplexing, yet its apprehension to any degree goes with progress along the Path. Beyond this, the conclusion accords, as we shall see, with that of Part Two of *Reasons and Persons*: it represents a defeat for egoism achieved by a route quite different from that of Part Two.

63. How Reductionism bears on morality

Parfit's closing discussion of what his conclusions mean for morality is notably tentative. He is as concerned to expose differences and difficulties as to argue for conclusions. Among these difficulties, in one or other guise, is the identity problem. Here we come to the heart of the present argument. Parfit is well aware that many writers, past and present, have held that the deep 'further fact' of identity denied by Reductionism is indispensable to morality. Only on such a conception, can responsibility be attributed and desert assigned.

There are two points for debate. The first is concerned with my responsibility for my past. Here, the Lockean notion is explicitly 'forensic', attributing responsibility to the person, and so openness to consequences and liability to punishment. This view of the matter is taken over by Parfit. He holds that in the case of my brain – or part of it, as in the case of Division – passing directly into the body of another, responsibility passes with it. He writes: 'Even when the person in Jack's body cannot be called me … he can just as much deserve punishment or reward for what I have done'. [354] What are we to make of this when the punishment is bodily? Will it not be Jack who suffers, not Person-Parfit? Locke envisages a comparable possibility, but trusts to divine

[353] Op cit p.281

[354] PARFIT(3) p.271. Parfit adds, by way of justification, 'As Wiggins writes, "a malefactor could hardly evade responsibility by contriving his own fission"'.

intervention to stop it being realised. [355] This recourse is not open to Parfit, who has to stomach the consequences of the 'forensic' conception.

Parfit's reflections are taken further. In cases where connection and continuity are by way of Relation-R, where they obtain only over a wide time-span, responsibility (and culpability) may be appreciably reduced. 'When some convict is now less closely connected to himself at the time of the crime, he deserves less punishment'.[356] For the Buddhist advocate, the point of concern is not quite the one which Parfit addresses here, which is one of what should most properly – justly – be done by way of judicial process. It is, rather, one of what should be taken to have happened, or to be due to happen, as a matter of course. On the distinctively Buddhist notion of consequence, extending to consequence through rebirth, desert is not assigned. Assignation goes with judicial punishment, a process for which the identity of agent and assignee is plainly necessary. On the Buddhist notion, desert follows, through *karman* running through Relation R. If Relation R is 'what matters', the forensic notion becomes one of the assignee receiving the just due of the agent. Fitness and appropriateness are guaranteed. The same will be the case where concern for the future is in question.

The second point bears on the concern I should have for my future. It is here that the identity problem will be found to be acute. Parfit, rightly, sees it as many-faceted, and exposes it by way of well-chosen quotation. Here are three instances, the first, from Sidgwick, bearing on the Reductionist conception of the subject :

> Why .. should one part of the series of feelings .. be more concerned with another part of the same series, any more than with any other series? [357]

Parfit comments: 'Wiggins suggests that this question has no answer'. He goes on to quote Madell, exposing the hardly escapable self-concern attached to the problem:

> It is obvious that I have every reason to be concerned if the person who will be in pain is me, but it is not at

355 LOCKE p.338
356 PARFIT(3) p.326
357 PARFIT(3)p.307. SIDGWICK, pp.418/19

> all obvious that I have <u>any</u> reason to be concerned about the fact that the person who will be in pain will have a certain set of memory impressions [358]

Then, at the end of Part Three, there is this, from Haksar, bearing on general concern:

> .. if Parfit's .. theory is correct, if there are no persistent individuals (except in a trivial sense), why should we get so worked up about suffering in the world? Suffering would still be real, but how much worse it is when (intrinsically) the very same individual keeps suffering on and on.[359]

All three quotations tell the same story. Parfit now expresses their burden as the so-called 'Extreme Claim'. On this Claim, it follows from the reductionist view, whether Parfitian or Buddhist, that 'we have <u>no</u> reason to be concerned about our own futures' (Parfit's emphasis). [360] In restating this claim a page later, Parfit puts it that 'we have no reason to be specially concerned about our own futures'. The addition of 'specially' is significant, and it makes most sense to treat of this second version. The discussion that follows takes us to the heart of the identity problem, laying bare its intractable quality. Parfit considers the case of the Non-Reductionist who takes the 'further fact' to be the only defence against concession of the Extreme Claim. Suppose he then ceases to credit the 'further fact' and becomes a Reductionist. Does he have to concede the Extreme Claim or – instead – only what Parfit calls the Moderate Claim? The proponent of the Moderate Claim holds that Relation-R, in the absence of the 'further fact', is enough to give good grounds for special concern about the future.

The discussion of the Extreme and Moderate Claims which follows ends on an inconclusive note. The Extreme Claim is 'defensible', but it can also be 'defensively denied'.[361] The Buddhist advocate is likely to be in the same state of indecision. In one respect, the Extreme Claim will be highly sympathetic: its acceptance will carry with it

358 PARFIT(3) p.307
359 PARFIT(3)p.345
360 Op cit p.307.
361 Op cit p.312

an undercutting of the grounds for egoistic self-concern. But this acceptance also makes it harder to continue to hold to a claim that seems of equal importance, which is that caught by the words, 'at that time Sariputta was X'. Could X, many lives ago, have been in a state of indifference between a future life as Sariputta and one in hell? Here is the identity problem at its plainest.

A third claim is conceivable, though it is not one put forward by Parfit. It is founded on the possibility of my caring disinterestedly for the future of all sentient beings. It might then be claimed that I would be caring for my own future, as that category is one that must include myself, at least here and now. Parfit's point is whether there are grounds for special concern for my future, when this future is a matter of Relation-R. According to one's view of this third claim, which I will call 'minimal', it either misses Parfit's point or makes it irrelevant. I will not discuss this Minimal Claim here, but mention it here by way of putting up a marker. I will return to it below.

Parfit seems to find the inconclusiveness of the argument by no means intolerable. He finds it possible to live with what amounts to the identity problem. He is far from finding in this an impulsion to moral scepticism. His position differs, of course, from the Buddhist's in that he is in practice concerned only with a single life. In the normal case, the flow of series-persons sustained by Relation-R will bring about only that degree of difference between its first and last components which will leave many intuitions largely sustainable. The Buddhist advocate will not have this assurance, concerned as he is – at least in principle – with many lives and with large expanses of time.

From that perspective, there is little point in weighing up Parfit's arguments, as they bear on the Extreme and Moderate Claims, or in tracing a path through the extensive debate which has resulted. From the Buddhist standpoint, the Extreme Claim would be better called the Extreme Negative Claim. For full reassurance, the Buddhist advocate needs to substantiate an Extreme Positive Claim, one which reflects the larger Buddhist concern. This would have to go so much beyond Parfit's Moderate Claim that the substantiation (or not) of the Moderate Claim would add little to consideration of our prime concern . I will however return shortly to the persistent difficulty, in bringing up Paul Williams' consideration of Santideva's treatment of special concern for the future.

This is best dealt with in the context of Parfit's exposition of a related question in Part Two.

Parfit's second thoughts, expressed 1999, do not much advance matters from this. In summing up his exposition of INW, he concludes: 'Even if this impersonal scheme is metaphysically no worse than ours, it might be worse in other ways'.[362] He finds a good consequence of INW in its making easier a relative indifference to death, and the possibility of bad consequences in a weakening of sympathy for others and in indifference to morality. I will come back to the risk of this last consequence in my last chapter, remarking now only that, in these respects, the Buddhist and the Parfitian Reductionist are in much the same boat.

64. 'Can Parfit help?' – a view from the side

I end this discussion of Part Three by dealing briefly with a line of argument largely concerned with Parfit, but from another perspective. This has little direct bearing on our main concern but casts some useful illumination cast from the side. It is offered by Siderits in his book, *Personal Identity and Buddhist Philosophy: Empty Persons*.[363] The first half of this work is given to Siderits' vindication of a broadly Parfitian form of Reductionism, in the course of which he draws on arguments to be found within the Buddhist tradition. It will be apparent that his object in so proceeding is the reverse of my own. In the second half, Siderits considers the case for 'anti-realism', drawing again on the Buddhist tradition for support. The real threat to Parfitian Reductionism, he contends, comes from the anti-realist standpoint. In concluding, he recommends a stance of 'ironic engagement' – that of both seeing through useful assertions and sustaining them. Here, I can consider only what Siderits has to say about Reductionism. It should however be borne in mind that he goes on, after a fashion, to subvert his own arguments. In doing so, in the course of discussing 'emptiness', he raises questions in epistemology and semantics which could not be dealt with briefly.

362 PARFIT(6) pp.266/67.

363 Published in 2003. See SIDERITS. I have written more fully about Siderits elsewhere: see FARRINGTON.

There are two questions: whether Siderits makes out his own case, and whether I can draw on him for support in sustaining the reverse, yet not incompatible, position which I have been considering. In other words, can Siderits help? In answer to this, one can say that Siderits brings out the compatibility of Buddhist and Parfitian arguments. To that extent he supports what I have said above.[364] He also clarifies matters by placing the form of reductionism which he advocates on a scale, locating it between Non-Reductionism and 'Eliminativism'. Eliminativism is the account which cuts the person-notion out of consideration. This ordering of conflicting views makes it possible to locate the Pudgalavada, which appears on the scale between Reductionism and Non-Reductionism. [365]

All this helps to clarify things. Its helpfulness in other ways is more dubious. Siderits' own version of reductivism is notable for the detail of its specification. He goes beyond Parfit in the spelling out of what reductionism amounts to and how it works. [366] The person is seen as a congeries of elements, resembling an assembly or committee, so set up as to manage 'its' progress through experience in response to stimuli. What Siderits seems to suppose is a system driven by considerations of utility: the morality of 'its' actions is to be seen in terms of the minimisation of pain, its own and others', and of serving the purposes of benevolence. This has to be 'reductionism', on Siderits' range of options. It appears, however, more closely to resemble Siderits' own 'Eliminativism' or the 'hyper-reductionism' of Parfit's categorisation. It is hard to see how such a conception could support the 'person' of Parfitian Reductionism or that of Buddhist understanding. To the extent that it is persuasive, it is more likely to count the other way. As my account of his Reductionism version should have shown, Parfit maintains a delicate poise. If Siderits is right, this balance may be unsustainable.

A reading of Siderits may prompt the thought that there are risks to any project of supporting Buddhist positions by way of recourse to contemporary Western philosophy. Matilal might have had such an instance in mind in observing that 'Buddhism … should distance itself from modern reductionism … In spite of the allure of the moral theory it

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[364] SIDERITS, chapters 1 and 2.
[365] Siderits also distinguishes reductive and non-reductive 'mereological supervenience' – that is, the supervenience of the person on the *skandhāḥ,* which is non-reductive for the Pudgalavada.
[366] SIDERITS, Chapter Three, especially p.47 and after.

seems to endorse … [reductionism] seems to be of one piece with modern naturalism'.[367] He goes on: 'It may be necessary to revive, within the modern Western analytical circle, the old classical Indian or the eighteenth-century Western (anti-scientist) 'pre-modern' concern for the dignity of human nature'. This line of thought deserves to be considered more fully than is possible here. It does not, I think, tell against my considering how far Parfit's aguments may be open to appropriation in support of Buddhist notions. It is telling in registering the gulf between Parfit's broadly Utilitarian presumptions and those of the Buddhist tradition. [368] Parfit 'helps', so far as he does, as much as in being open to appropriation, as in being truly sympathetic.

65. What does Part Three establish?

A solution to the identity problem must have three components. First, it must make intelligible the Buddhist account of the subject. Parfit's arguments for Reductionism offer strong support forwhat I have called the 'weak' notion. Anyone concerned to make the case for this central part of Buddhist metaphysics now has available arguments of striking ingenuity which, if Parfit is right, offer powerful support. For all the baldness of his reference to the Buddha as a predecessor, Parfit's assurance of a convergence between his position and the Buddhists' seems well grounded.

The second and third components of a solution are more problematic. The second must make intelligible the connection between subjects over time. This connection needs to be shown to obtain both within a lifetime and across lifetimes. It must make it possible to understand how Sariputta goes on being Sariputta, and also how, and in what sense, Sariputta was X, a living thing at a time gone by. Parfit's account of Relation-R and of 'series-persons' offers a way of understanding this. This account is suggestive and, to that extent, helpful. It seems to mark out a way in which rebirth might be intelligible. The question remains whether it does any more.

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[367] See *The Perception of Self in the Indian Tradition,* contained in MATILAL, pp 299-314. I quote from p.312.

[368] I have in mind the presumption that human happiness is what matters, and that the more there is of it the better. This understanding in terms of *quantum* puts Parfit's a long way from any 'virtue ethics' conception, whether Aristotelian or Buddhist.

Third, a solution must show that the subject has grounds for concern for the future, in particular for the future of what he will conceive of as himself. I took the case of Sariputta ('at that time Sariputta was X') as a typical instance of what we find claimed, and of what needs to be vindicated. Sariputta should be concerned for the future of Sariputta. X must find a motivation to action or abstention in the prospect of being reborn as Sariputta. Here, as we have just seen, there is little help to be found in Parfit. Parfit finds the Moderate Claim defensible, but does not venture to exclude the Extreme Claim, that 'we have <u>no</u> reason to be specially concerned about our own futures'. In this respect, Parfit sees what I have called the identity problem and leaves it open and unresolved.

<u>66. Parts One and Two of *Reasons and Persons*</u>

There is nothing in the earlier Parts of *Reasons and Persons* which bears as directly on the identity problem as does the argument of Part Three. There is a less direct bearing, which is important. Part Two has an extended discussion of reasons for action, extending to a sympathetic presentation of disinterestedness. Part Two also treats more fully than Part Three of the Buddha and his teaching. It presents Parfit's critical view of the ethics associated with certain religions, Buddhism among them. This can be seen as the basis of the plea for 'non-religious ethics' with which the work concludes. In all this, we find an oddly ambivalent view of the Buddha. In the Concluding Chapter the Buddha appears as a probable precursor within the field of non-religious ethics, after having figured earlier as a proponent of notions inseparable from what Parfit is criticising. This ambivalence – or confusion – is, I will suggest, capable of being removed, to the advantage both of proponents of Buddhism and of defenders of Parfit. In what follows, I will be concerned almost entirely with Part Two. I start, however, with Part One, which marks out the concerns of Part Two.

<u>67. Part One: a clearing of the ground</u>

Part One clears the ground with its consideration of reasons for action. Parfit opens with the question: 'What do we have most reason to do?' Answers to questions such as this, wide and generalised in their scope, amount to 'theories'. He goes on:

> We can describe all theories by saying what they tell us to try to achieve. According to all moral theories, we ought to try to act morally. According to all theories about rationality, we ought to try to act rationally. Call these our <u>formal</u> aims. Different moral theories, and different theories about rationality, give us different s<u>ubstantive</u> aims. [369]

This process is best illustrated by Parfit's own examples. These are presented as current and influential and, I think, as having an intuitive appeal and a certain obviousness.[370] One such is the Self-interest Theory – which Parfit calls S. This is a theory about rationality:

> S gives to each person this aim: the outcomes that would be best for himself, and that would make his life go, for him, as well as possible. [371]

Another, about morality, is Consequentialism, Parfit's C. Another is the Present-aim Theory, Parfit's P. [372]

Part One is entitled "Self-Defeating Theories'. A theory is self-defeating if acting on it works against the achievement of its aim. An instance of this, on Parfit's showing, is a version of P. P 'tells each to do what will best achieve his present aims'. [373] Parfit deploys arguments making use of dilemmas to show the weakness of this simple version. [374] If he is right, P can be charged with being self-defeating in the longer-term:

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369 PARFIT(3) p.3
370 As we shall see, the procedure follows Sidgwick's isolation of his 'methods' in *The Methods of Ethics*.
371 PARFIT (3) p.3
372 I will follow Parfit in using such abbreviations.
373 PARFIT(3) p.92
374 Such as the familiar Prisoner's Dilemma

follow P, and on each occasion I may do best on P's terms but worse overall than by doing S. Part One is in large part given over to consideration of such cases. S is appraised against the same criteria. The distinction between the formal and substantial is plainly to the point. A particular application of S or P might be found to be self-defeating, but that does not dispose of S or of P; the <u>form</u> of coherent rational action may still be of such a kind.

Beyond this, Parfit considers Common-Sense Morality and finds it in need of revision. Close analysis shows that theories of rationality and morality may be taken to ground particular applications that are self-defeating. The broad conclusion, expressed most clearly only at the end of the whole work, is that our morality needs to become more impersonal. Self-concern of a kind natural in a context in which the consequences of actions were more readily seen is now – so goes the argument – likely to be bad for us. Later in the work, when Parfit enlarges on the 'liberating' aspect of the case for Reductionism, we can see the point of having this argument and that of Part Three within the same covers.

<u>68. Part Two: the method of *The Methods of Ethics*</u>

I simplify greatly and for my own purpose, but not, I think, in a disabling way, in saying that Part Two has as its prime concern the reasoned rejection of S. The ending of Part One has been inconclusive, insofar as Parfit has not disposed of S – of S as a theory about rationality – by way of bringing out its vulnerability to self-defeat. The rebuttal of S is the thread which can be seen to run through an argument of great complexity from the opening of Part One to the close of Part Two. I need to give some account of it, as I will argue that the conclusion is one which the Buddhist advocate should find congenial.

We will not go very far into *Reasons and Persons* before we come to appreciate that Parfit's S is related – just how is the question – to one of the 'methods' which Sidgwick styled Egoism. Parfit deals with Sidgwick as he deals with Locke, drawing on him to suit his own immediate purposes. There need be no complaint about this use of a predecessor, but it comes at a price. Sidgwick's own position becomes plain only in part

and by degrees. This can be perplexing. I start therefore with some account of *The Methods of Ethics.* [375]

By ‘methods’ Sidgwick means ways of proceeding, viewed systematically and critically. To quote his own words, from his opening paragraph, a ‘method’ is ‘any rational procedure by which we determine what individual human beings ‘ought’ - or what it is ‘right’ for them - to do ...’ A ‘method’, so defined, may be found articulated by anyone sufficiently aware of his practice. Viewed uncritically and in isolation, any one method may seem to enjoy a self-evident cogency. A properly critical approach is likely to weaken this assurance, and to call its rationale into question. Sidgwick therefore brings the various methods he finds employed under three heads. This restriction by way of categorisation, which much of the first Book is given over to making and justifying, is the method of *The Methods of Ethics*.

The term, ‘method,’ has to be considered in relation to ends. Here, Sidgwick takes it that ‘the only two ends which have a strongly and widely supported claim to be regarded as rational ultimate ends are ..... Happiness and Perfection or Excellence of human nature ..’ [376] Happiness as an ultimate is found to be divisible into that of the individual and that of the generality. Perfection or Excellence is found to be deeply connected with the exercise of the virtues and with a focus on the rightness of actions *per se*. On this view there are three ends and no more, to which the whole work is devoted by way of their consideration as ‘methods’. These are Egoism, the end that is happiness in individualist terms; Intuitionism, as Sidgwick terms the focus on Perfection, our power ‘of seeing what actions are in themselves right and reasonable’; and Utilitarianism. All other apparent ends may, on Sidgwick’s account, be subsumed under these three.

After much consideration, Sidgwick finds the methods of Intuitionism and Utilitarianism to be compatible - indeed, to need each other. The distinct method of Egoism remains. Sidgwick judges, unwillingly, that Egoism cannot be argued down. He

[375] SIDGWICK. Parfit holds Henry Sidgwick (1838 – 1900) to be a figure of prime significance. See PARFIT (3), sec. 67: ‘I would prefer to have lived through the previous centuries, having had among my friends Hume, Byron, Chekhov, Nietzsche, and Sidgwick’.

[376] SIDGWICK p.9

refers to 'an ultimate and fundamental contradiction'. [377] In other words Egoism cannot be squared with Utilitarianism, now with its Intuitionist grounding. It cannot, Sidgwick concedes, be shown to be in the Egoist's interest to act altruistically, in the Utilitarian's sense of this term. This conclusion, on which *The Methods of Ethics* will end, is indicated early on. In a note to Chapter 6 of Book 1 Sidgwick criticises Bentham's doctrine, as he understands it, 'that it is always the individual's true interest, even from a purely mundane point of view, to act in the manner most conducive to the general happiness'. He comments (my underlining), 'this .... <u>which I regard as erroneous</u> ... may be inferred'. [378] Here is the point - the piece of unfinished business - that Parfit picks up.

<u>69. The Self-interest Theory (S) and Sidgwick's Egoism</u>

I have not yet brought out the various forms in which S is to be found, or the care with which Parfit distinguishes them. Three of the most plausible receive a brief summary at the start of *Reasons and Persons*: they are the Hedonistic, the Desire-Fulfilment and the Objective List Theories.[379] It may be enough to say that Parfit's designation of each variant gives a sufficient impression of its scope: it is clear that there can be different criteria for my life going, for me, as well as possible and, I think, it may be granted that what the variants have in common characterises S well enough for the purpose. Parfit has said, at the very start: 'On all theories, the Hedonistic Theory is at least part of the truth. To save words, this will sometimes be the only part that I discuss'.[380] This may be so, though for most of Part Two the Desire-Fulfilment version is the more prominent and, it seems, the one principally under discussion.

It is in the passages within Part Two where S is most clearly under attack that two features of the Theory – two which Parfit holds to be of the essence – are most in play. These are that S is neutral across time and that it is biased towards the self. [381] The latter needs no stating as an aspect of a Self-interest Theory; the former is only slightly less

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[377] SIDGWICK p.508
[378] Op cit p.88
[379] PARFIT(3) p.4. The variants are considered much more fully at Appendix I.
[380] Op cit. p.4
[381] PARFIT(3) Part Two *passim*.

obvious, as concern for <u>total</u> well-being can readily be seen to have a temporal extension, with equality of concern along the extension. Both features are defining characteristics also of Sidgwick's Egoism. In the case of the former, we find:

> … this equal and impartial concern for all parts of one's conscious life is perhaps the most prominent element in the common notion of the rational – as opposed to the merely impulsive – pursuit of pleasure.[382]

In the case of the latter, Sidgwick relies on the acceptance of the principle as obvious:

> .. . the wide acceptance of the principle that it is reasonable for a man to act in the manner most conducive to his own happiness.[383]

It must be a question how Sidgwick's Egoism and Parfit's S are, together, to be understood. The terms themselves suggest an identity. This is however declared only rather late. As the work proceeds, the identity of S with Egoism - if identity it is - seems increasingly obvious. It is not however stated explicitly before section 54, entitled 'Sidgwick's Suggestions':

> Sidgwick's *Egoistic Prudence* is the Self-interest Theory about rationality [384]

It is the main concern of the first half of *Reasons and Persons* to rebut S. Part Two ends with the claim that this has been done. In effect, this is a claim on Parfit's part to have gone beyond his master. Are matters so straightforward? Egoism is a method in ethics, while S is a theory about rationality. In section 49, Parfit writes:

> A moral theory asks, not 'What is rational?', but 'What is right?'. Sidgwick thought that these two

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382 SIDGWICK, p.124 footnote.
383 Op cit p.119
384 PARFIT(3) p.138

> questions were, in the end, the same, since they were both about what we had most reason to do ..... A century later, these two questions seem further apart . [385]

As a demonstration why Sidgwick was mistaken, as he seems to be judged to be, this is too bald to convey much. None the less, we can see why Parfit insists on the distinction. The approach that goes along with it allows the irrebutability of Egoism to be considered outside Sidgwick's self-imposed framework; only so, it seems, in different dress, can it be found rebuttable.

Sidgwick's Egoism may have its origins, at least in part, in Aristotle. This is suggested by Sidgwick's evident concern to distinguish what he calls Egoism from Self-Realisation:

> …. We must discard a common account of Egoism which describes its ultimate end as the 'good' of the individual; for the term 'good' may cover all possible views of rational conduct. [386]

The objective caught by such passages as this may be seen as a decided and conscious narrowing of the complex account of the good to be found in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. This narrowing may then be seen as the bringing about something more coherent. It is the isolation of a strain that has often been remarked in Aristotle, for instance by Ross. Commenting on Aristotle's presentation of the *megalopsuchos* (great-souled man), Ross remarks: 'The passage merely betrays somewhat nakedly the self-absorption which is the bad side of Aristotle's ethics'. [387] It seems fair to say that Sidgwick isolates this 'bad side' as a 'method', and surveys it on its merits. Parfit will argue down and, on his own view, defeat what Sidgwick felt compelled to let pass.

This is not all that might have found its first prompting in Aristotle. The emphasis on 'equal and impartial concern for all parts of one's conscious life …', in the passage

[385] PARFIT(3) p.129
[386] SIDGWICK p.91
[387] ROSS p.208.

quoted above, recalls Aristotle's stress on 'the whole life' as the locus of consideration and concern. [388] This will be of the essence both of Sidgwick's Egoism and of the Self-interest Theory. I deal below with Parfit's association of these theories, which he is concerned to rebut, with prominent strands in traditional religion. He might, it seems, have pointed also to a distinguished philosophical grounding.

70. *Karman* in Sidgwick and Parfit

At the very end of *The Methods of Ethics* there is some discussion of how it could be made to be in the Egoist's interest to act on Bentham's principle – that is, ' .. in the manner most conducive to the general happiness'. On the postulate of God and of an apparatus of divine reward and punishment this could be made to be the case, but at the price of the sacrifice of the autonomy of ethics. Just after this, there is a tantalising reference in a footnote to *karman*, though Sidgwick does not use the word. He understands the Buddhist notion perfectly well, remarkably so for his time:

> In the Buddhist creed this notion of the rewards inseparably attaching to right conduct seems to have been developed in a far more elaborate and systematic manner than it has in any phase of Christianity. But, as conceived by enlightened Buddhists, these rewards are not distributed by the volition of a Supreme Person, but by the natural operation of an impersonal Law. [389]

Marginal in its context, the point made is central to the concern of this thesis. What Sidgwick should have told us is whether he judges this 'natural operation' - as if one of divine action, but stripped of its divinity - to be open to the objection that he finds attached to divine action of the familiar kind. One thing seems clear that Sidgwick would not have denied. That is that the *karman*-postulate, if it should be substantiated, would give the problem quite a different look.

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[388] ARISTOTLE (3) 1098a

[389] SIDGWICK p.507. The use of the word 'enlightened' is unhappy in this context. Sidgwick means 'sophisticated'.

We find no such direct concern with *karman*-doctrine in Parfit, but it is this that Parfit is describing when he deals with the influence of religion on morality, at least with that of the Buddhist strand within such influences. He takes a high view of what he is doing in attempting to dislodge S. He sees S as having been dominant for centuries, having been shored up by calculations of religious origin, whether of divine judgment or of consequence by way of reincarnation. On such a view, *karman* - or K - is one expression of S. An S-theorist may become a Buddhist, and so take K as a guiding principle. He may come to see the need to modify his conduct in line with his newly acquired sense of what is *kuśala* and what *akuśala.* The shape and determination of his moral programme will, however, remain the same, even if its contents are somewhat different. He will continue to be concerned for the outcome that 'would be best for himself, and that would make his life go, for him, as well as possible'. K, if he comes to accept it, will give him the assurance of achievement.

Parfit deals nowhere with the Buddha's teaching of K, and the range of application of the *karman*-notion is, therefore, nowhere brought out. His few references to the Buddha are approbatory. This is no doubt because he recognises the closeness of his and the Buddha's notions of the person. Beyond this, he sees the Buddha as a likely predecessor, one of only a few, in the field of non-religious ethics:

> … before the recent past, very few Atheists made Ethics their life's work. Buddha may be among this few …[390]

In its place at the very end of the work, this reference has a strong emphasis.

71.*Karman* and self-interest

[390] PARFIT (3) p.453

In the following paragraphs I shall consider the application of the *karman*-notion with a view to seeing how it interacts with other parts of Parfit's presentation. K may be clarified and made more accessible thereby, to the advantage of its deployment in Buddhist ethics. For this purpose, I will take K to cover the first three applications only of those listed in Chapter Three. [391] It will be recalled that K1 is both the method and the fruit of self-training and moral discipline; K2 is the particular retribution and reward of action, maybe shocking and sometimes much deferred. K3 is the extension over more than one life of K1 and K2. I shall normally refer to 'K', being more specific only where necessary.

The application of K which fits with Egoism and S, is - very largely - K2. Parfit therefore seems to have real grounds for associating certain strains of religious practice with support for S. The following puts the point forcibly, if in a way that betrays simplification:

> The Self-interest Theory has long been dominant. It has been assumed, for more than two millennia, that it is irrational for anyone to do what he knows will be worse for himself. Christian writers have assumed this, since, if Christianity is true, morality and self-interest coincide. If wrongdoers know that they will go to Hell, each will know, that in acting wrongly, he is doing what will be worse for himself. Christians have been glad to appeal to the Self-interest Theory, since on their assumptions S implies that knaves are fools. Similar remarks apply to Moslems, <u>many Buddhists</u>, and Hindus. [392] (My underlining)

The demolition of S may therefore tell at least against the doctrine of these 'many Buddhists'. I have already suggested that Parfit seems none too sure what to make of K in its Buddhist expression, or indeed what to make of the Buddha.

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[391] K4 and K5 are special cases, which can be disregarded here.
[392] PARFIT (3) p.130

72. The rebuttal of the Self-interest Theory

K has a much wider range of application than Parfit appreciates. In what follows, I will suggest that there are some understandings which sort happily with alternatives to S. This is important, as it would be a substantial point against Buddhism if Parfit were correct in taking the Buddhist understanding of K to be one that sorted only with S, and were then persuasively to rebut S. If there are understandings of K which sort with some preferable alternatives to S, Parfit's vindication of these alternatives, or of any one of them, will be welcome.

The rebuttal of S – that is, of 'philosophical' or 'principled' selfishness, as it may be called - may be taken to entail that of Egoism, on Sidgwick's account of it. It may also entail the rebuttal of what may be called 'unprincipled' or 'vulgar' egoism, the 'selfishness' described by Sidgwick at the end of 'The Methods of Ethics". This comes at the very point where he is conceding the 'fundamental contradiction' which, I have suggested, Parfit offers to resolve. Vulgar egoism is described with some energy:

> .. amid all the profuse waste of the means of happiness which men commit there is no imprudence more flagrant than that of Selfishness in the ordinary sense of the term, - that excessive concentration of attention on the individual's own happiness … the selfish man misses the sense of elevation and enlargement given by wide interests; he misses the more secure and serene satisfaction that attends continually on activities directed towards ends more stable in prospect than an individual's happiness can be …. (my underlining). [393]

If we are concerned with how far Parfit can help, then on these successive grounds the rebuttal of S may be a welcome move. It appears to have wide-ranging consequences

[393] SIDGWICK p.501

and to bear on a state of affairs where the identity problem remains intractable. To the extent that this intractability is damaging to the scheme of Buddhist ethics, a persuasive conclusion against Egoism (or selfishness), whether 'philosophical' or 'vulgar', may be a reinforcement of the scheme.

Parfit's arguments against S are extended and complex, going far wider than our own immediate concern. It therefore seems enough to state the outcome, then to consider whatever pertinent points the course of argument brings out. The outcome is that S is brought under attack as being doubtfully coherent, as being 'a hybrid theory'. As such, it is found to fail. The attack comes from two sides at once. It comes, first, from the standpoint of morality (M). Though Parfit nowhere says much to explain what he means by M, it seems safe to take it to be Sidgwick's two remaining (and reconciled) Methods, those that become Intuitionism-with-Utilitarianism. One reason for so doing is that it is <u>this</u> conjunction that must come to seem decisively preferable to Egoism if Sidgwick's outstanding problem is to be solved. It also fits with this presumption that Parfit finds M to be associated with Neutralism. This is Parfit's term for agent-neutral theory. If M is what I have taken it to be, it will have that grounding in generalisability and impartiality that seems to sort well with Neutralism.

The attack comes, second, from what Parfit calls the Critical version of the Present-aim Theory (CP). CP is a version of P that has self-criticism built into it. CP holds that some desires are intrinsically irrational, and so no reason for action, and that some desires are rationally required. [394] In offering it, Parfit stands out against the Humean tradition which has it that a desire cannot be *per se* rational or irrational. Rebuttal is by way of counter-examples. The upshot is that CP, as a theory of rationality, is found to defeat S. This is not quite the common case of one theory being found more persuasive than another. CP is not one such - delimited – theory: it is, rather, one of exceptional scope. One form of CP might be S. This would be the case of finding in a particular instance, after the appraisal that is of the essence of CP, that one's best present aim is S. On another occasion, CP might require M. As Parfit says in his conclusion, 'if we accept CP, we could claim that it is rationally required that our strongest desire be to avoid

[394] PARFIT (3) p.118

acting wrongly'. [395] This is not the claim that CP and M coincide. Moral considerations cannot be the sole ground of action. [396]

On account of this width of scope, CP may seem a vacuous theory. Parfit is aware of this: 'Remember finally that every possible theory about rationality is one version of CP'. [397] He explains that he is far from meaning that no purported version of CP should be rejected: a theory may fall short of the standards of CP by virtue of being biased or irrational. S is to be taken, in general, as a theory to be rejected. This being Parfit's approach, I am inclined to take CP as a theory about theories about rationality - that is, to be a contribution to metatheory. This is not how Parfit puts it, but I believe it to be faithful to his line of argument to take CP as a theory of theories, specifying the standards a theory must reach for it to be worth considering.

73. The Self-interest Theory and the self

The identity problem is at the heart of the clash between S and CP, which turns in large part on the recurrent charge of 'hybridity'. It is of the essence of S that I want the best for myself over my whole life. I act therefore, if a follower of S, with a bias towards myself, and so with no interpersonal neutrality, yet with indifference, or a degree of indifference, with regard to timing, and so with intertemporal neutrality. As Parfit puts it, ' ... the word 'I' refers to a particular person in the same way in which the word 'now' refers to a particular time. And when each of us is deciding what to do, he is asking, 'What shall I do now? Given the analogy between 'I' and 'now', a theory ought to give both the same treatment.' [398] On Parfit's view, P is a theory that fails to do this.

The implications for the identity problem should be apparent. The discussion is one of the questions, 'Who?' and 'When?'. Any response to the challenge, 'Why should I give weight to aims that are not mine?', will bring both into play, as the counter-challenge will be, 'Why should you give weight now to aims that are not yours now?'. Recall the *skandha*-analysis of the subject and the *karman*-doctrine, and the questions they raise

[395] PARFIT(3) p.194
[396] Op cit p.133
[397] Op cit p.194
[398] Op cit p.140

can be seen to lie within the same discussion. How should we understand the subject? What is its future and what are the concerns of its future? Who will experience the realisation of the 'aims' that are postulated?

This is the best moment to turn to some highly relevant consideration of the same question by Paul Williams.[399] This is founded on discussion of a verse in a celebrated Mahayana text, Santideva's *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, written in Sanskrit long after the end of our period:

> *Tadduḥkhena na me bādhety ato yadi na rakṣyate* ।
> *nāgāmikāyaduḥkhān me bādhā tat kena rakṣyate* ||

Williams translates literally:

> Supposing one says that the suffering that happens to
> that [other] person does no harm to me, therefore
> (s)he should not be protected against [it] then since
> the sufferings of future bodies also is doing no harm
> [to you now] why is that to be protected against?[400]

I paraphrase as follows:

> If it should be said that the suffering of someone else
> does no harm to me, with the suggestion that I need
> not intervene to prevent it, then the response should
> be that future suffering does no harm to me now, yet
> I do not think that it is not worth preventing.

Williams explains: 'Santideva had already urged that suffering is to be removed simply because it is suffering … The fact that the suffering is <u>mine</u> does not make it morally more significant'.[401] He now goes on to consider the force of this argument, drawing on

[399] WILLIAMS P: Ch.2.
[400] Verse 8.97. See WILLIAMS P p.30.
[401] Op cit p.30

the extensive Tibetan commentary (where I can make no pretence of following him) and on Parfit.

I simplify a complex argument by saying that, on Santideva's view, whoever suffers, in line with *karman*, the future consequences of my present actions will not be me, and that he or she is as much other to me in this present life as contemporary others are other than me. [402] Therefore, if I am concerned to minimise future suffering, I should – to be consistent – be equally concerned to minimise the present suffering of my contemporaries. Here is a conclusion to a fair degree in line with Parfit's in Part Two. Though Parfit lacks the Buddhist notion of karmic consequence, he has the concern for the future which makes up one part of it. It was this concern which prompted his inconclusive discussion of his Extreme and Moderate Claims. He differs from Santideva in lacking also the ideal of general benevolence. In his concern with consistency, he agrees with Santideva, but he cannot resolve his indecision over his two Claims by dissolving the difference between them in an invocation of such benevolence.

It is important to note here that consistency can be two-edged. Williams finds it arguable that reflection on Santideva's argument should lead us to conclude that it can, disconcertingly, be reversed. It is also largely Parfit's view. I might conclude, therefore, that I have no grounds to care about my future - that is, I take Parfit's Extreme View – and have therefore no reason to care for other contemporary beings. I will come back below to this resonant riposte, which I find telling.

These are points on which Parfit's master has already declared himself, not - Parfit judges - very happily. Parfit's own discussion is prefaced by an extended quotation from Sidgwick, in which he judges Sidgwick to 'go astray'. [403] Sidgwick, it seems, asked the 'Who?' and 'When?' questions with two different notions of personal identity in mind The inter-personal question has behind it the sort of notion which Parfit will go on to criticise in Part Three; the inter-temporal question has behind it a 'reductionist', Humean, notion. Parfit finds that, 'the two ... cannot both be well grounded'. [404]

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402 At least in this context, Santideva seems to go beyond Buddhaghosa in judging 'his' successor entity to be 'other' – without qualification. This is made clear in the verse immediately following the one quoted.
403 SIDGWICK p.418/19. PARFIT(3) p.137/38.
404 PARFIT(3) p.139.

74. How should *karman* be understood?

It should be evident that K - more especially K1 - sorts well with CP. This is to say that Parfit is wrong in his exclusive identification of it with S, but successful in providing a conceptual structure in which the mistake is readily corrigible. He will also be found to be right - without quite understanding how or why - in his appropriation of the Buddha as an ally. K, or at least a main strand of K, corresponds to CP because the training, self-discipline and self-cultivation (*bhāvānā*), which are of the essence of K1, are as 'karmic' as the concern with reward and retribution. K can therefore readily accommodate the need to appraise motivations, judge the rationality of desires, and train and develop the heart. K can very well accommodate the self-sacrificing action which, Parfit suggests may be required by CP. An example of this last is what Parfit calls My Heroic Death. This is required by the form of CP which Parfit labels CP2. 'There is at least one desire that is not irrational, and is no less rational than the bias in one's own favour. This is the desire to do what is in the interests of other people, when this is either morally admirable, or one's moral duty'.[405] It may be misleading to speak of Buddhist concurrence with this judgment, as its terminology implies a conceptual scheme far removed from anything Buddhist. [406] It can however be claimed that the Buddhist tradition prompts action of the same order as the 'heroic death' which Parfit proceeds to describe, stating the obvious in adding, 'This version of CP conflicts with S'. In this sense, there is a concurrence, which is well caught by a Pali Jataka story. [407] The Bodhisatta (Buddha-to-be), embodied as a hare, moved by compassion for some hungry people, jumps into the pot over the fire. Parfit's words, applied to his own example, seem to catch what the hare might say: 'I am doing what, knowing the facts and thinking clearly, I most want to do, and what best fulfils my present desires ..... I also know that I am doing what will be worse for me …'.

[405] Op cit, p131
[406] This can be illustrated by pointing to the remarkable difficulty of translating Parfit's words into Sanskrit or Pali.
[407] No.316. This is a series of moralised folk tales, a component of the *Khuddaka Nikāya,* presenting the Buddha in his previous lives, often those of an animal.

A critic might riposte to the hare/Bodhisatta that, in doing what is worse for him, he is doing what is best for him. K, even as K1, ensures that. On a long-view he cannot be worse off. Acceptance of this does not however entail acceptance of what Sidgwick calls ‘psychological Hedonism’ and Parfit ‘Psychological Egoism’. This is, in brief, the doctrine that I cannot but do what is, by some process of definition, in my interest. On this, I need say only that I find Parfit’s dismissal of it fully persuasive. [408] He plausibly claims that the doctrine may be made trivially true - by definition - but is otherwise rebuttable by observation. I think we are inclined to view the Bodhisatta sacrificing himself much as we view the case of Captain Oates walking out into the blizzard. To judge Oates to be self-interested - he was doing what he wanted - seems sustainable only on the trite, purely definitional, grounds I have just criticised. The same conclusion seems applicable to the hare or to some unknown practitioner acting with something like the hare’s sympathies.

75. Part Four of *Reasons and Persons*

I complete this consideration of *Reasons and Persons* by touching briefly on Part Four. This is entitled ‘Future Generations’ and is concerned with how these generations should be regarded and with how a moral concern for them should be applied. It opens with some account of how persons are individuated by their genetic make-up. Parfit declares his concern to be with personal identity ‘in different possible histories of the world’.[409] This is to be distinguished from the subject of Part Three, personal identity over time. Concerned to make a modest and, he supposes, uncontroversial, statement of the facts, Parfit offers the following, his Time-dependence Claim:

> If any particular person had not been conceived
> within a month of the time when he was in fact
> conceived, he would in fact never have existed. [410]

The words, ‘in fact’, should be noted. Parfit wishes to sidestep any treatment of the necessary properties of a person. He presents various views of these properties, but

[408] PARFIT (3) sec.48
[409] Op cit p.351
[410] PARFIT (3) p.352

declares that the holders of all plausible views would agree with him, if not about what could have happened, then about what would in fact have happened. A person is what he or she is by virtue of the fusion of male and female genetic material peculiar to a particular act of intercourse. It follows that, if I had not come into being when I did, I would almost certainly never have come into being. [411] Very slight adjustments to the conditioning factors – of great complexity – that brought about particular acts of intercourse would have resulted in the coming-into-being of different people. [412] When therefore, we consider the differing effects on future generations of differing practices and policies, we are not comparing the consequences for the same people. Differing practices and policies will have generated differing consequences, which will have brought about distinct future generations. It seems that this must affect our sense of what we are doing when we appraise consequences.

Realisation of this opens the door to an argument which may be found disconcerting. Acting so as to damage the living-conditions of a future generation may be a matter of indifference, if a different and less damaging course of action would have brought into being different people. If the lives of those belonging to the former hypothetical generation are going to be at least worth living (Parfit's phrase), what – on a proper view - will they have to complain about? If things had been different, they would never have existed. Parfit dislikes this conclusion and, to avoid it, claims that a policy or decision may be bad even if it cannot be shown to be bad for anyone in particular. He does not discuss the possibility of the same being the case with policies and decisions we hold to be good, but this seems a natural extension of the claim.

Part Four has too little bearing on the identity problem to need to be treated at length, but I should point out one development of this argument to which I will refer in the next chapter. The case Parfit imagines is one of a great increase in population, where very many people lead lives which are just worthwhile. As he puts it:

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[411] Exactly the same combination of genes carried by a particular ovum and a particular spermatozoon may be possible, as it might occur twice within a period of a few days, but such an outcome is, clearly, unlikely in the extreme.

[412] Consider how easily it could have been the case that any particular set of parents never met, let alone how easily any instance of sexual congress might have been anticipated or deferred.

> For any possible population of at least ten billion people [Parfit's argument requires this figure], all with a very high quality of life, there must be some much larger imaginable population whose existence, if other things are equal, would be better, even though its members have lives that are barely worth living. [413]

How should we value this state of affairs, when we compare it with one of a greatly smaller total within which many people lead lives which are much more than just worthwhile? The aggregate of satisfaction is higher in the former case, while common intuition rates the latter case more highly. Parfit finds the conclusion just quoted 'repugnant', while finding it not easily avoided. Here, it seems, is a problem.[414] While I cannot consider it here as it deserves, I will touch in Chapter Six on those broader presumptions of Parfit's which make it natural for him to bring up the difficulty..

What is to the point is Parfit's concern for future generations. We saw from the *Mettāsutta* that the expression and direction of *mettā* was toward 'those-wishing-to-be-born', as well as to the living. [415] Parfit's emphasis is fully compatible with this, however limited the relevance of his immediate concerns to the present argument. I will pick up this concern for future generations in Chapter Seven.

76. Conclusion

Here I limit myself to what I take to have been established by my review of Parts One and Two of *Reasons & Persons*. Part Three has been dealt with above, and I need say no more about Part Four. I believe that I have shown how the *karman*-notion (K) is a presence in the argument of both Sidgwick and Parfit. Both are aware of it, and their treatment is in part - not a large part - explicit. Parfit identifies K with the Self-interest

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[413] PARFIT(3) p.398

[414] In this paragraph I am summarising, and greatly simplifying, what Parfit sets out on pages 382 to 390.

[415] Section 18

Theory (S), which is itself to be identified, in a way that is not straightforward, with the Egoism of Sidgwick's discussion. S is a theory of rationality, taken by Parfit to be dominant and uncritically accepted. Parfit presents arguments for taking S to be 'hybrid' and so, to a degree, incoherent. Though preferable to the naive form of the Present-aim Theory (P), S falls to be superseded by the critical version of P, CP. If we hold to S, K will suffer the damage inflicted on S. I argue that K, properly understood, is to be associated with CP rather than with S, though I grant that a common application of K is indeed close to S. It follows from this that Parfit's arguments do not tell against K, nor against the scheme of Buddhist ethics of which K is an essential component. On the contrary, the 'karmic' approach receives some fortification. As Parfit is concerned to have the Buddha as an ally, though - it seems - without appreciating the difficulty of that on his own terms, the conclusion should be welcome.

It follows that the Parfit of Parts One and Two can help with the problems with which we are concerned in several respects. First, the rebuttal of S, or of what I have called 'philosophical' egoism, can only be of support to a tradition such as the Buddhist, especially if the rebuttal is taken to extend to that of 'vulgar' egoism or selfishness. Second, the corresponding vindication of CP has a comparable and more positive effect. It shores up the grounds for the principled adoption of self-sacrifice often found in the Buddhist tradition. Furthermore – and here is the closest approach to the identity problem – it allows the question of personal continuity inevitably raised by S to be disregarded. This conclusion seems to be permitted by Parfit's argument for full relativity, treating 'I' as 'now' is treated, though in discussing Santideva's closely comparable argument I pointed out the force of Williams' indication that this argument was capable of reversal. Third, not directly argued by Parfit but, I believe, going with his arguments, the Buddhist tradition is freed from the attribution to it of a notion of *karman* that is nothing but K2. Acceptance of CP as a principle of action fits well with a view of K that gives full weight to K1.

CHAPTER SIX

Is Parfit right?

77. What is Parfit's subject?

My discussion of Parts One and Two of *Reasons and Persons* was close to an appraisal. My summary of Part Four was too brief to offer ground for an appraisal. I will therefore be concerned here only with Part Three. [416] What follows will be more or less critical, and I will not expound on the power and ingenuity of much of Parfit's argument, which should be recorded now and which I fully grant.[417]

The first point to be made has already been suggested. [418] It is that there is an uncertainty in Parfit's discrimination of terms, in *Reasons and Persons*, which may leave it unclear what his subject is. The unwished for pun is hard to avoid. We have seen that Locke offers a sorting-out of terms, with a discrimination of 'man', 'soul' and 'person'. Parfit's grounding in Locke makes it surprising that he neither follows Locke's discrimination at all strictly nor offers one of his own. He has nothing to say about 'soul'; his reference is commonly to 'persons', except where he speaks of 'we' or 'us'; until Part Four, there is little about 'man'.

This is a sphere of thought where terminology is resistant to standardisation. Common usage follows that of philosophers in being imprecise. I have already noted Locke's recognition that in common usage 'man' (or 'human being') and 'person' were interchangeable. Parfit conveys his recognition of this, when he considers the implications of Reductionism for morality, here for the moral standing of abortion:

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[416] I find nothing plainly wrong in Part Three, except some remarkable assertions in section 77. Parfit is discussing the consequences of accepting the Physical Criterion: Those who do, 'believe that someone cannot have a life after death, unless he lives this life in a resurrection of the very same, physically continuous body. That is why some Christians insist that they be buried. They believe that if … they were burnt on funeral pyres … not even God could bring them to life again' (p 204). One wonders who these Christians are who credit such a limitation of divine power.

[417] Sorabji, in a generally critical appraisal, comments that Parfit offers 'the best challenge to normal views, worked out in depth with originality, clarity, and honesty' (SORABJI, p.265). I agree.

[418] See p.148 above.

> Most of us do not distinguish persons from human beings. But some of us, following Locke, make a distinction. These people typically claim that a human being becomes a person only when this human being becomes self-conscious. [419]

These words are striking both for their lack of emphasis and for their place – very late – in Parfit's exposition. The Lockean discrimination referred to here, almost in passing, is the one which has been fundamental to Parfit's own handling of the matter. Why does he not make it at the start and insist on its importance? We find no such insistence, and a wobbliness in making the distinction is noticeable throughout Part Three. At the opening of Part Four, there is a plain departure from Locke. What Parfit there calls the 'person', in the context of 'different possible histories of the world', can only be the 'man' or 'human being' of Locke's analysis, now given greater depth by being presented in terms of his genetic make-up.

Considering the term 'person' by itself brings up further uncertainties. Quite early on, in answer to the question, 'What is the nature of a person?', Parfit writes: '.. to be a person, a being must be self-conscious [and other things] ..'. The thought behind these words appears to be that of an entity's <u>counting as</u> a person. This is not – it seems - quite the same as that of its <u>possessing</u> personhood, personhood being the Lockean entity, marked out – at the least - for forensic purposes and accorded its own identity conditions. Possession, by itself, is something to be registered; what it will be to count seems to be, at least to a degree, for us to determine. This leads to a further distinction. Counting as a person is close to, yet distinct from, being <u>accorded</u> personhood, as if personhood were something analogous to citizenship. If the analogy is sound, we might be free to decline to accord it.

Both these notions – 'counting as', 'being accorded' – are likely to come into play in any discussion of what Reductionism might mean for the morality of abortion. It may be claimed that the entity whose abortion is in question is a person. It may also be claimed that its status is far enough from being clear-cut for us to need to agree (or not) that it should count as a person, or - a different approach - agree (or not) to accord it that

[419] PARFIT(3) p.322

condition.[420] Parfit's words, just quoted, would be compatible with 'being accorded', a slight ambivalence noticeable elsewhere. Here is a departure, or two departures, from the strictly Lockean understanding which, indeed, may be judged to go with a simplicity of view not always sustainable. In sum, Parfit's use of the term in *Reasons and Persons* extends from the narrow conception, in terms of consciousness, to the classificatory notion that both recognises and accords a status, and – further - to the common usage that admits no distinction from 'human being'.

So much for *Reasons and Persons.* In the later article already referred to, Parfit declares that it is:

> acceptable to claim that what we are <u>essentially</u> is human beings, treating the concept 'person' as a phased sortal … so that we exist before we become persons and we may continue to exist after we cease to be persons. (Parfit's emphasis) [421]

The words 'acceptable to claim' may suggest that Parfit is less than fully committed to this position. If that is so, it may be why this restatement, which I take to be of prime importance, has no greater emphasis. What he must be taken to mean is that 'a human being' enjoys, at least for much of the time, and assuming that that being and the conditions of existence are normal, the concurrent description 'person'. In other words, some human beings are to be classified as persons. Parfit adds that we should accord 'special moral status' only to persons. This restatement, which he presents as a concession, has the decided advantage of anchoring his conception of the person within a familiar philosophical frame. A sortal is a second-order classification. It is 'phased', in that an entity - here a human being - comes within the scope of its categorisation and may pass out of it. Ceasing to be an infant may be the point of entry, senility that of departure. Madness, or some comparable trauma, may remove one from it in midlife.

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[420] The distinction between counting as a person and being accorded personhood is comparable to that between recognising that someone has 'human rights' and favouring some process, legislative or other, that confers these rights on that individual.

[421] PARFIT (6) p.218

The details of all this are, no doubt, open to argument. What follows from this change of mind or shift of emphasis on Parfit's part is that while the person is conceptually distinct from the human being, it is nothing of a substitute for a soul. From this fresh standpoint, it appears that Locke was badly misleading in seeing the person as even conceivably detachable from the human being of which it is a categorisation.

In sum, my first point is that something of a blur vitiates the whole argument of Part Three of *Reasons and Persons*. Parfit's later reformulation of his position, if it is that, while highly suggestive, does not altogether remove this. I will come back to this below, where I will suggest that there is unfinished business.

78. Does Parfit move too quickly?

At least in *Reasons and Persons*, Parfit has to be considered as a follower of Locke. He opens by presenting a Lockean account, seeking to improve and clarify it, and finding all defensible versions of it reductionist. After that, the argument moves swiftly.

Parfit continues the tradition of Locke's early commentators in employing counter-factual illustration. [422] He opens Part Three with an extended fancy, which prompts the question: 'What can we learn from this imaginary story?' [423] By 'learn' he will mean our being driven to appraise our assumptions about personal identity. In setting the frame of the argument that follows, he takes his grounding in Locke's discussion, finds deficiencies in this, which are readily exposed, and states what he will take a criterion of identity to be:

> I shall mean <u>what this identity necessarily involves, or consists in</u>. [424]

He then offers two such criteria, both of which have been set out above. Introducing the Physical Criterion, he declares:

[422] MARTIN & BARRESI: Preface.
[423] The example is 'Teletransportation': see section 57 above.
[424] PARFIT (3) p.202

> This [Locke's account of the identity of physical objects] enables me to state one of the rival views about personal identity.[425]

It is not clear from these words whether the 'rival views' are two only, the other being the Psychological Criterion to which he will shortly move, or if a larger class is implied. Only two views are presented at this point, each related to one of the two Criteria offered, and both found to be 'Reductionist'.[426] Parfit's procedure is, in effect, to mark out personal identity and then to 'reduce' it. The effect of this is to put the two Criteria – the only two - into possession of the ground. The burden of proof comes to rest on the proponents of Non-Reductionist views. To appreciate this need not be to register a point against Parfit. He has the difficult presentational task of giving expression to the very notion, that of personal identity, which he will find to be reducible. Reductionism can be given coherent expression only when the entities to be 'reduced' are clearly in view.

This narrowing of the field of consideration is the more noticeable in the light of Parfit's offering a 'better' version of his Physical Criterion than the one that was first apparent. Both these were quoted in section 55 above. I remarked on the oddity of the first version's reference to 'my brain and body', as if the brain were something other than the body. Parfit's preferred version refers only to the brain, doing so in its expression of personal identity over time in terms of the continuity of <u>enough</u> of the brain – that is, of enough to ensure this, in the event of brain-splits or accidents.

Parfit must find this 'better' because it makes the requirement for physical continuity minimal. The 'better' version has the further merit of largely coinciding with the Psychological Criterion on its narrow version – that is, with the normal cause of psychological continuity. Parfit's presumptions and resultant strategy are clear. It must however be a question whether a 'less good' version can so easily be left out of consideration. This might be defined in terms of the whole brain or in terms of a sufficiency of it, one or other of these supporting whole-body continuity.

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425 Op cit, p.204
426 Op cit p.210

This 'less good' version will be, in effect, a fuller version of the Physical Criterion, restoring specifications which Parfit discards. I will dub it the Living Thing Criterion. A first statement of this Criterion might be:

> A person continues to exist if and only if his or her body, including the brain that is part of that body, continues to exist and to be the body of a living human being [or 'man' in Lockean terms, or possibly 'animal']. Personal identity over time amounts to this continuance.

This form of words will be open to criticism of the kind deployed for other purposes throughout Part Three. Does the brain have to be the whole brain? Suppose there were an entity made up of a part-brain, abstracted from a living thing, and then implanted into the emptied skull of another body. That possibility – if it were such - would be something like Shoemaker's 'Brownson' example. [427] If the residual part-brain were enough to support the continued life of the original living-thing, should we say that that thing persists?

Parfitian ingenuity is a stimulus to invention along these lines; the challenges just suggested might be met by such elaboration. My concern is not to produce the most nearly watertight definition, but to suggest that there is an arbitrariness of selection in Parfit's presentation or, at least, an excessive speed in the marking out of the ground. This will seem all the more plainly the case when we recall Locke's account. In summarising this account, I referred to the way we find both a classificatory notion of the person and a view of personhood as made up of persistent self-consciousness.[428] Both of these seem compatible with a Living Thing Criterion of personhood.

On the Living Thing Criterion, the person is an entity inseparable from the 'man', or living thing with which it is associated, and therefore no more 'reducible' than the man is reducible. The account of the genetic constitution and individuation of human beings which opens Part Four seems to fit well with this. In an endnote, Parfit discusses the

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[427] Section 55 above
[428] Section 54 above

connections between the person 'in different possible histories of the world' and the continuity of the person over time.[429] It will be recalled from Chapter Four that his account of the former dealt with the origin of the person, and that he claimed his view of this to be compatible with a variety of different views of the necessary properties of personhood. In the endnote, he comments on the congruity of some of these views with the Criteria (as he has defined them) of personal identity. There is no need, or space, to review these here, but one of them is much to the point. Parfit points out the ready compatibility of the Physical Criterion and the Origin View of what is necessary for identity in different possible worlds. The Origin View is that:

> each person has this distinctive necessary property: that of having grown from the particular pair of cells from which this person in fact grew. [430]

Parfit comments:

> [The Origin View] could be combined with the Physical Criterion. On the most plausible versions of this criterion, one essential property of each person is that he has enough of his particular brain to support fully conscious life. It might be claimed that it is an essential property of any particular brain that it grew from a particular fertilized ovum. [431]

This might indeed be claimed. The riposte to Parfit's words is, surely, that the claim might be made all the more plausibly, because all the more naturally, with regard to the whole body. Genetic endowment serves as an explanatory factor that bears on the whole life. The stronger and more obvious claim would be that the Origin View is open to be combined with the Living Thing Criterion. If this is right, Parfit's failure to bring the Living Thing Criterion into consideration will seem all the more a weakness in the argument of Part Three. In the 1999 article, we find the – admittedly offhand –

[429] PARFIT(3) Note 6 to Part Four
[430] Op cit p.352
[431] Op cit Note 6 to Part Four

modification of this argument by way of the proffer of a phased sortal. The essential concurrence of this modified account with what I have offered here is, I think, plain enough. This adds force to the point that Parfit moves too quickly in the setting-up of the argument to which he will proceed in the remainder of Part Three.

79. Quasi-memory

In Chapter Five, I gave some account of Parfit's exposition of the concept of 'quasi-memory. I remarked on its importance for Parfit's argument. Wiggins states this well enough, remarking that the defender of Parfit

> needs to invoke some mental state or capacity that closely resembles plenary or identity-involving experiential memory, yet is neutral with respect to identity. It will be this that has to make survival conceivable without identity …[432]

This 'invocation' is a late move in a very long-drawn-out argument. I remarked above how Locke's account of the person prompted an objection from Butler, which has hung over discussion of the subject ever since.[433] Wiggins' recent contribution records his final acceptance of the force of Butler's point.[434] It is therefore of prime importance to Parfit's argument that his presentation of quasi-memory should be persuasive.

There is a simple objection to quasi-memory with some resemblance to the more fully elaborated appraisals to which I will proceed, and I will state it now, in the hope that it points the argument the right way. Parfit supposes the case of Jane, who wakes to a new set of memories: 'She seems to remember looking across the water to an island, where a white Palladian church stood out brilliantly against a dark thundercloud'. [435] Jane has never been to Venice, but identifies this as a memory of Venice and (let us suppose) knows how she has acquired the 'memory', one of quite a number. These 'memories',

[432] WIGGINS p.212
[433] See section 58 above
[434] WIGGINS p.211
[435] PARFIT(3) p.220

Parfit's quasi-memories, come to her in 'the first-person mode of presentation', and from inside are indistinguishable from memories *tout simple*. From outside, they are readily distinguishable, as Jane can investigate her own past. Her case is instanced by Parfit to establish that 'her' assemblage of memory-chains is not to be defined as hers, quasi-memory being conceivable. It may therefore be taken to constitute her self-consciousness and so, on the Lockean conception, her personhood.

A riposte to this is that, in practice, it is open to Jane not to take 'true' memory to be a subset of quasi-memory, as Parfit's argument requires. In practice, she will mark off each of the two from the other in such a way as to make possible self-definition in terms of the former alone. This would seem to be no more difficult or surprising than a making of the same distinction between her 'original' body parts and a substitute organ of different provenance. The implanted heart, for example, may be fully part of its present owner's life-system and, in that significant sense, his or hers, yet continue to be judged other and distinguishable. If I have many such implants, I might say, ruefully, 'there's not much of me left'. If this is right, the claims made for quasi-memory stand to be subverted by the existence, in each and every case, of an inner core of memories defined by reference to a person. Here is Butler's point revived.

A criticism which seems closely comparable to this is made by Cassam, who observes:

> ….. even if it makes sense to suppose that one might quasi-remember someone else's past experiences, ordinary memories necessarily have what might be called epistemological primacy over mere quasi-memories…… [If this is so] one will be guilty of falsifying the actual nature of psychological continuity if one describes it as involving anything other than continuity of memory. It is not acceptable to regard psychological continuity as involving continuity of quasi-memory rather than continuity of memory, given that experiential remembering must be ….. the

> primary form of access 'from the inside' to past experiences.[436]

Cassam considers how this 'primacy thesis' might be parried by the Reductionist. For this purpose, he distinguishes between internal and external views of personal identity. The former, involving the consciousness of personal identity is an epistemological question. Here is the concern of the passage just quoted. The latter is metaphysical – specifically, ontological: its concern is the challenge made by Butler. It may be argued that the primacy thesis has no bearing there. Against this, Cassam claims that even an external view must do justice to someone's 'subjective take' on his persistence. Parfit's Psychological Criterion, as set out at the beginning of his argument, offers – at least as to (1) and (2) of its defining elements – an appealing account of personal identity. The introduction of quasi-memory will weaken this appeal. Here is a dilemma: without a persuasive case for quasi-memory, Butler's objection is telling; with such a case, Parfit's account will lose, to the extent of its persuasiveness, what Cassam calls 'one of its central motivations'

A complementary line of criticism is to be found in McDowell. This is one of denial that quasi-memory can be what it is required to be – that is, 'an autonomously intelligible faculty of knowing the past from a participating perspective but without commitment to the participant's having been oneself'. McDowell claims that in Parfit's expression of it the notion is of something less than memory, one fewer thing being involved. His own claim is that reflection shows memory to be the prime notion, with quasi-memory a derivation from it. The case is not one of one fewer thing being involved; it is one of an element in the notion of memory being discarded. It will then be a question whether what is left will permit what he calls 'adequate explication' of the concept. He suggests that there will be a crippled notion of memory rather than the less demanding one which would be up to meeting, and needing only to meet, something less than the normal demands going with the notion of memory. In sum, Parfit 'reduces the idea of the first-person mode to unintelligibility' by detaching memories in the first-person mode 'from their purporting to be about ourselves'. [437]

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[436] CASSAM(3) p.175/76

[437] DANCY, especially sections vi and vii.

McDowell also considers the counter-factual cases adduced by Parfit to show what quasi-memory might be like in practice. One such is that of amoeba-like splitting, where two or more successor-beings keep a cognitive hold on the experience of the pre-split unitary entity. McDowell's point here is that the content of the consciousness of the successor-beings need not be seen as identity-neutral. It would be quite as plausible to suppose that a radically different context of facts would make intelligible the content of backward-looking consciousness and that this might be of the kind to involve identity. Otherwise put, a complete reordering of the context of experience, such as that produced by a move towards proliferation through division, might conceivably lead to me – say – grasping and tracking my experience in a way now hard to imagine. This is not to say that I can take it first as experience and then, having apprehended it in first-person mode, add or not add an apprehension of it as my experience. As McDowell puts it, 'we have been given no good reason to believe in the substratum of identity-free relations'. [438]

What might Parfit say in reply? McDowell anticipates one response, which would be to say that he and other critics of Reductionism 'impose parochial restrictions on the imagination' in taking the operations of consciousness to be what we now experience them to be. Are we so numbed by the normality of the normal that we keep out of view alternative conceptual possibilities which may be real ones? On this, I can say only that one can grant Parfit's ingenuity, with its large reliance on the counter-factual, yet question the basis on which he sets the argument up. McDowell's response is the brisker one that 'one can imagine tamperings with nature after which the only possible response would be to shrug one's shoulders'. [439]

Wiggins' treatment of the topic recalls Cassam's remarks on 'epistemological primacy'. He asks,

> ….. could a species of memory that was identity free
> play the role that is played in the epistemic economy
> by ordinary memory? [440]

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[438] DANCY p.245
[439] DANCY p.245
[440] WIGGINS p.219

The question, inviting the answer No, comes in the context of weighing up the notion, offering sophistications of it and considering ripostes. Wiggins remarks that it was 'wise [of] Parfit to define 'quasi-remember' positively and outright rather than by an attempt at subtraction' and then to evoke ordinary memory only obliquely. For his own part, he is clear that quasi-memory is a notion involving subtraction: it is memory-minus – that is, minus the identity of an agent ('Minus', it seems, suggests something other than 'quasi', as the latter might be taken to have, whatever the distinction, the weight and scope of memory *tout simple*). He proceeds to assert the unviability of memory-minus. Knowledge, experience and memory are bound together and registered in a partial narrative of a life, extending to what I am to do in the next five minutes. Identity is not eliminable from this:

> Any serviceable or intelligible notion of quasi-memory that depends on the given meaning of 'remember' needs to respect the links that connect experience with knowledge. And these involve identity.

What this seems to come to is that there can be no such 'serviceable and intelligible notion'. [441]

These three appraisals of Parfit's notion have much in common. They add substance and detail to my own opening criticism, which is why I call them in support. The broad conclusion is that quasi-memory has to be very much like memory to serve the purpose assigned to it, yet to differ from it sharply in lacking the association – the necessary association, it is urged - with identity. What would Parfit say by way of reply? The most promising line of defence – not one employed by Parfit - might be to set out a notion of what might be called 'inchoate experience'. This term would denote experience before it is pondered or sorted out into kinds and categories. The experience of the first few moments after waking up might stand as an instance of this. In these moments I may be aware, with minimal self-awareness or none, of the content of a dream, of the state of a body, perhaps of a discomfiting need to get up. What I call 'awareness' would be a matter of feeling as much as of apprehension. Different instances of the experience

[441] WIGGINS p.219

might be connected by way of the resemblance of components, which yet, as being inchoate, need not be taken to be in any necessary association with a subject. 'Inchoate experience' – it might be argued – might then replace 'quasi-memory' in an amended Parfitian scheme. It might be claimed:

> Since inchoate experience does not presuppose personal identity, it may be part of what constitutes personal identity. It may be part of what makes me now and myself at other times one and the same person.

Here is something of continuity: if we take experience of waking moments as typical of the category, successive inchoate experiences will have a certain family resemblance, and so have an aptness to constitute personal identity without there being any presumption of it. The notion may therefore be capable of development into something which would serve Parfitian purposes at least to a degree. This is, I think, the best that can be done.

In discussing quasi-memory, and concluding as I have, I am not dismissing the notion as one might dismiss an unfounded assertion of fact. Parfit's brain-scanning conjectures are certainly imaginable and may be realisable. The point is, rather, that the concept of quasi-memory is a curiosity. The formation of concepts comes about from the need to order and make sense of experience. Concepts will be open to revision in the light of fully, or more deeply pondered, experience. Fresh concepts become established to the extent that they are useful, and on their first presentation will fall to be appraised in that respect and in that of their compatibility with those other concepts which are certainly useful. In time, the acceptance or employment of a new concept may bring about the giving-up or sidelining of concepts employed before, even those seemingly indispensable.

If this is how fresh concepts come into play, the concept of quasi-memory seems a poor prospect. It should be suspicious that the notion seems to be formulated, and to be offered, with the sole object of providing an answer to a philosophical difficulty – in this case, Butler's criticism of Locke. That is to say that it is not a notion which the

contingencies of existence force on us. Strawson's dismissal of the comparable notion of 'process-things' is usefully suggestive here. That notion is found to lie behind the suggestion that 'Caesar' is the name of a series of events, a biography. Strawson comments

> [Those inclined to this view] draw attention to the possibility of our recognising a category of objects which we do not in fact recognise: a category of four-dimensional objects, which might be called 'process-things' …[442]

If quasi-memory – also - falls short of being a notion that we 'in fact recognise' - or need – we should be shy of building very much on it.

80. Determinate or Indeterminate?

On a narrow view of the question whether Parfit is right, it would, I believe, be defensible to end discussion at this point. If quasi-memory is unsustainable as a notion, and if Butler's criticism of Locke is decisive, it follows that Parfit's development of Locke's treatment of identity will also be unsustainable. On a broader view, this conclusion will be strengthened if I succeed in making a positive case for the Living Thing Criterion with which I dealt in opening. So far, I have shown only that Parfit leaves it out of account. I will however consider, before attempting this, Parfit's treatment of the determinacy or indeterminacy of identity. It is one of his prime contentions that identity may be indeterminate – that is, all the facts of a case may be known without it being clear whether a specified entity is in existence or how what is in existence should be identified. Indeterminacy has more than its own importance in Parfit's assertions. It is important also because Parfit has it that it is one component of a group of claims which stand or fall together. [443] It is, therefore, much to the point whether his arguments for indeterminacy are compelling. If they are not, the damge to his whole case may be appreciable.

[442] Strawson P.(1) pp.56/57
[443] PARFIT(3) p.216

Any good argument for indeterminacy would have some appeal, if only because it should allow us to avoid some unpalatable conclusions which, in special cases, may follow from the assumption that determinacy is assured. The Brown/Brownson example has been taken to show that personal identity on the Psychological Criterion would persist even through even extreme distortion of what normally obtains.[444] Understandable as this reaction may be, it involves remarkable contortions of thought.[445] The appeal of Parfit's quite different approach will be obvious. I will argue that the Living Thing view excludes these unwelcome and implausible conclusions at least as well as Parfit's contentions. However, there is much point in showing that even on Parfit's own terms the arguments for indeterminacy are not decisive. This is what I will now seek to do, by way of recourse to the stipulation which Parfit himself touches on but proceeds, too readily I think, to dismiss.

Mackie has commented helpfully on the perplexing identity questions sometimes brought up by living things. [446] He finds it undeniable that it will sometimes be difficult to accommodate the passage of living things through time within the logic of identity. He finds that special provisions will sometimes be required. The example he offers is that of the splitting of a daffodil bulb, where we are likely to say that the larger of the two resultant parts carries the identity of the original, especially when it is much larger and yet more especially when the other part has been destroyed. If this is challenged, we may say that a touch of arbitrariness does less damage to an otherwise sound conceptual scheme than does acceptance of indeterminacy. A defence on these lines seems also to be available to proponents of stipulation in the case of the Combined Spectrum. Parfit can have no ground for objecting to stipulation *per se*, as he employs it at an important point in his own argument. In defining psychological connectedness, he makes the common-sense stipulation, taking it to need no defence, that 'we can claim that there is

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[444] For this reaction, see WIGGINS p.206/07.

[445] Do these need to be spelled out? If the entity we may call 'Brown's-brain-in-Robinson's-body' recovers sufficiently from his trauma to resume sexual relations with the woman whom he will remember to be Mrs Brown, the children who may be born will be - presumably? – Robinson's by virtue of their genetic inheritance from Robinson – that is, Robinson understood as Robinson's body. We may then have to admit the possibility of a man begetting another man's offspring. Or do we say that the 'body' does something quite alien to the 'person', though the two make up a living unity? Here is the *reductio ad absurdum* of one widely held view of Brown/Brownson.

[446] MACKIE(1) Ch.5, especially pp.144/45

enough connectedness if the number of direct connections, over any day, is at least half the number that hold, over every day, in the lives of nearly every actual person. When there are enough direct connections, there is what I call strong connectedness' (Parfit's emphasis). [447]

In suggesting what stipulations might resolve the difficulties of the Combined Spectrum, I can do no more than offer examples. I am concerned to vindicate an approach, not to proclaim an unquestionably best solution, which is something likely to emerge only from much discussion. With this caveat, I recall Parfit'own example, presented in that context, of 'his' transformation, at once physical and psychological, into a replica of Greta Garbo, and claim that once at least 20% of 'Parfit's' body and at least 20% of his brain-state have been destroyed, we may take 'Parfit' to have gone out of existence. [448] At the other end of the spectrum, we might say that, when we have at least 80% both of the body and of the brain-state of Greta Garbo – at a particular point in Garbo's life - then we would have a replica of Greta Garbo. As for the intermediate stages, we might say – supposing the process to be slow – that a human entity will always be in being and that beings notable as distinct will be observable in succession.

This suggestion will be more persuasive if I suggest a parallel. One is available in the sequences of photographs sometimes produced in newspapers, which start with the face of some well-known person and end with that of someone notorious. [449] The images in between, perhaps half a dozen, represent the stages of transformation. An unbroken process is presented, as it has to be, as a succession of stages. In the same way, we might say that we have successive beings in the course of the transformation of 'Parfit' into Greta Garbo, observing that there is always a living thing, just as there is always a face. This does not mean that the points at which one living thing is marked off from those on each side of it are the only possible ones. There is no inevitability in this, and the markings off of discrete living beings, and so, in a sense, their creation, will be as much a matter of choice as the marking off of images in the process of facial transformation. While certainly arbitrary, it is defensible on the ground that, in

[447] PARFIT(3) p.206, also p.222
[448] For Parfit's example, see PARFIT (3) p.237
[449] A recent comparison by a retired Treasury official of Gordon Brown to Stalin prompted the publication of facial sequences- Brown at one end, Stalin at the other - along with jocular comment.

exceptional conditions – and those of the Combined Spectrum are certainly exceptional - there will be no alternative to a form of stipulation which makes it permissible to claim that at any point on the spectrum, at any time, there is one thing or another. This will be less hard to accept if we imagine the 'Parfit'-Garbo transformation being brought about at an uneven speed. If the changes, physical and psychological, were to be brought about in alternating bursts and near-pauses, we would in all likelihood take the entities in existence between the bursts to be distinctly marked off? Do we then have to suppose that the imposition of uniformity of speed, by itself, would be sufficient to over-ride these distinctions? It would surely be as plausible to maintain that the distinctions remain but are harder to grasp.

Parfit has in mind arguments such as this one when he considers the view that identity must be determinate: 'If we hold this view, we do not believe that the true criterion of personal identity must draw some sharp borderline somewhere in the Combined Spectrum. Rather we believe that, to avoid incoherence, we should draw such a line.' This is indeed what I believe. Parfit's comment is that in such a procedure there can be no basis for mattering.

> When I consider this range of cases, I naturally ask, 'Will the resulting person be me? By drawing a line, we have chosen to give an answer to this question. But, since our choice was arbitrary, it cannot justify any claim about what matters. [450]

He claims that this view, if persuasive, supports his claim that personal identity is not what matters. He sees no reason to bother further with a perverse version of his Reductionist claim, as he takes this to be, which 'abolishes indeterminacy with uninteresting stipulative definitions'. There is force in this response. The riposte to it has to be that my claim is that the identity of a living thing will always be determinate or can defensibly – as above – be presented as such. Mattering is something else. I will discuss Parfit's understanding of what it is to matter, and the broader concept, below.

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[450] PARFIT(3) pp.241/42

My criticisms of Parfit's contentions are not, perhaps, decisive. It is not easy to see a way out of the *impasse* to which discussion of them has led. A more effective response is to be found in the Living Thing view, on which the bizarre conclusions which seem to follow from the Brown/Brownson example are as readily avoidable. On the Living Thing view, it is natural to claim that Brown has gone out of existence on the removal of an organ, the brain, vital to his continuity as a living thing. 'Brownson', whatever he is, is not Brown. This conclusion is only less obvious than it should be because the parallel case of Robinson's-brain-in-Brown's-body has been ruled out (This stipulation simplifies the question, but at the price of making the conclusion weaker). Parfit's own examples invite the same revision of view. One such is the division of 'my brain' and the transplantation of its two halves into the emptied skulls of my triplet brothers. Parfit asks whether I 'go on', in the sense of preserving my identity, through connection with one or other brother (in which case, which?), or through connection with both, or whether I do not go on. Objection is found to all three, or four, options. We are encouraged to conclude that there is indeed going on, through both brothers, though of a kind that does not bring up the question of identity.

What I take to be a much more plausible conclusion is, simply, that there is no going on. If I am the object of this process, I go out of existence when my brain is extracted from my skull and divided. Parfit cannot see this, because he does not take as primary the concept of the living thing. If I am, first and foremost, an animal, a living thing of the human species, it is inevitable that my existence will be interrupted – to say the least - by the removal of that vital part, my brain, and brought to an end by its division. Contemplating this contingency, I am clear that that would be the end of <u>me</u>. I may note that there would be psychological continuity between what I was and two persisting entities. As a living thing, I would not take this as my perpetuation. Whether I would take it to be 'as good as' - or, possibly, 'as bad as' - that perpetuation is something I will consider in Chapter Seven.

In this section, I have been concerned with questions which are less than fully arguable. My appeal, like Parfit's, has been to acceptability and plausibility, rather than to demonstrability beyond doubt. I must not, therefore, claim too much, but will rest on the negative claim that Parfit has hardly made out his case that the determinability

which goes with personal identity is insecure. We have only to keep living things in mind, however classified, to find dubious any suggestion that it is.

81. Aristotle and neo-Aristotelian contemporaries

What I have called the Living Thing view has a philosophical grounding and also a grounding in pre-philosophical innocence. The ultimate philosophical grounding is to be found in Aristotle's account in the *De Anima.* Aristotle's deployment of the soul-notion in this account is such as to serve as a mode of classifying living things. What he describes, in respect of human-kind, is a rational animal, which does not cease to be an animal by virtue of its endowment with a rational soul of some complexity. This allows us to form a conception of the human subject as such a thing, more specifically as an animal endowed with reason. The living thing – and so also the human or rational animal - enjoys a systemic unity and, when its existence is concluded, whether by death or by the breaking up of this unity, there will be no doubt about the fact. Its existence cannot be indeterminate. [451]

What might be called the plain man's way of holding the view I recommend may be brought out by an example, which will be found unsatisfactory. Imagine we are in a crowded public place and I say 'That's Jones over there', pointing with my arm. If you say 'Is that Jones you are pointing at, or Jones' body?', the answer has to be 'Jones' body', as only a physical object can be indicated by pointing. I might go on to explain my utterance, saying that I was picking out Jones by means of that indication of his body, adding that 'Jones' is a metaphysical conception, and that the words 'Jones' body' refer to an object in space, a thing in the world. There seems to be more to '<u>Jones</u>' than to his body - or more to Jones <u>than</u> his body - and the debate between Parfit and many of his critics, and many other such debates, is around whether this is really so and about what the 'more' might amount to. It extends to such issues as whether the notion of 'Jones' involves a further fact – further, that is, to his body, in which we might agree to

[451] The broad thrust of Aristotle's account seems to rule out anything resembling the detachable, immortal, soul of Plato's conception. There is, indeed, one much-discussed passage where Aristotle may be read as admitting such a conception (ARISTOTLE (1) 413b). I think my highly summarised account catches the dominant assertions of the work as we have it.

include his brain – and whether Jones has, or truly amounts to, a spiritual substance or immortal soul; it extends also to the possibility of the conception 'Jones' being fully reducible – that is explicable in terms which make it dispensible, if conventionally useful. Much of the discussion so far has involved such points.

On the Living Thing view, the way this consideration has been set up is deeply flawed. On that view, what I was pointing to was the living thing, Jones. That I was doing this this was as indisputable as my picking out of a living dog by means of pointing to and so identifying 'Fido'. Jones is, no doubt, a much more complicated entity than Fido. Just how, is the question. Here – baldly expressed - is what I take to be the view of pre-philosophical innocence, to which many philosophers, commencing with Aristotle, have accorded their broad endorsement.

The three contemporary philosophers whom I have already discussed are, I hope to have shown, broadly sympathetic to a Living Thing view. Wiggins is explicitly 'neo-Aristotelian' and McDowell is most clearly understood in such a way; Cassam is explicitly 'animalist'. It is on this basis that I draw them into support.

McDowell's examination of Parfit's procedure issues in a conclusion approximate to the one I have been urging. He begins by quoting Locke's presentation of a person as 'a thinking intelligent being, that has reason and reflection, and can consider itself as itself, the same thinking thing, in different times and places'.[452] I suggested in section 77 above that Parfit's treatment of Locke opens up a distinction between the claims:

> (a) that a person is a living thing ('a man') – that is to say, one such who is 'a thinking intelligent being …' - or a man who can be esteemed or granted to be such,

and

> (b) that a person is 'a thinking intelligent being …' in association, perhaps necessarily in association, with a living thing ('a man') throughout the existence of this last.

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[452] LOCKE p.335; DANCY p.230

For most of the time, Locke is clearly concerned with the second of these - that is, with the entity which it is his distinction in philosophy to have isolated and described. Sometimes, however, accepting, as we have seen, that 'man' and 'person' are often used interchangeably – he seems to be writing of the first. Much the same, as we have also seen, is true of Parfit. McDowell also seems to trade on Locke's concession of interchangeability and to employ both conceptions. This allows him to follow his quotation from Locke by recording Locke's stress that 'the continuity that constitutes a person's continuing to exist has 'an "inner" aspect'. [453] This continuity can only be that of the living thing – that is, of the first of the two senses of 'person' spelled out above. What is described as its 'inner' aspect is what is caught by the second of the two.

McDowell then characterises Parfit's innovation – quite accurately – as the recommendation that 'this "inner" aspect of personal persistence should be understood in terms of relations between psychological states and events that are intelligible independently of personal identity'. In other words, the Lockean person should be 'reduced' to the elements that have been taken to constitute it. From this, consequences follow which McDowell will proceed to discuss. He observes that Parfit finds only two ways in which what he has called 'the "inner" aspect' of a life may be understood, one involving the existence of a purely mental entity (a soul, or spiritual substance), the other being the reductionist view just sketched. McDowell suggests that, on Locke's premises, 'the continuity of "consciousness" does involve the continued existence of an entity; but the entity is not a peculiar Cartesian item, but a person of whose continued life that continuity is, precisely, an aspect'. [454] By 'person' here, he goes on to make it plain, he means 'human being, in the case that we have to regard as, at the least, central'. It is this that is picked out by the Living Thing Criterion. McDowell's analysis points to the arbitrariness in Parfit's disregard of it on which I remarked above.

McDowell then makes a closely comparable point from another angle, that of concern for alternatives to reduction. He has it that Parfit, on taking up Locke's conception, finds that 'there is no alternative to reduction except to commit ourselves to continuants whose persistence through time would consist in nothing but the continuity of "consciousness" itself'. [455] This alternative is plainly Cartesian in character. It seems to

[453] DANCY p.230
[454] DANCY p.232
[455] Op cit p.231

derive from the supposition that awareness of an identity through time goes with consciousness, the persistence of this identity not going beyond the flow of consciousness. The components of memory – events and the like – will then be found to figure in the passage through time of this entity. The divorce of what is so conceived from the life of the living thing with which it will be associated is clearly sharp. It is not this divorce that troubles Parfit however but, rather, the postulation of an unnecessary entity in what I have just summarised. The appeal of Parfit's Reductionism lies in the simplification which it offers: all that need be postulated is a relation of serial co-consciousness 'which might subsequently enter into the construction of a derivative notion of a persistent subject if such a notion seems called for'. As Parfit puts it, referring to this construction by way of our everyday talk of persons, 'that is how our language works'.

McDowell's case against Parfit, in sum, is that the arbitrariness of Parfit's procedure derives from yielding more to Descartes than he acknowledges. He writes

> the fundamental Cartesian mistake is not the postulation of spiritual substances, but rather the assumption, which is preserved in this implicit defence of Reductionism, that seems to pose that choice: the assumption that Locke's phenomenon must be understood in isolation ……[456]

in isolation, that is, from the life of a living thing. He grants that Parfit follows Locke in explicit dissent from Descartes, while finding Locke's procedure also to be vitiated by assumptions which he calls 'Cartesian'.[457] This sorts naturally with his reference to Lichtenberg's celebrated objection to Descartes: ' .. one ought to say, not "I think", but "It's thinking", on an analogy with forms of words like "It's raining". This leads to the claim – against Parfit – that Lichtenberg is proceeding by way of *reductio ad absurdum*, saying in effect that on Descartes' own premises, properly understood, there is no basis on which a subject might be postulated.[458] All this supports a sceptical view of

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[456] DANCY p.232

[457] McDowell grants later on that Locke can also 'carefully distance himself from Descartes'.

[458] PARFIT (3) p.224ff and p.517 n.20

Descartes' whole procedure, making the suggestion of unacknowledged Cartesianism all the more telling.

It was McDowell's criticisms of the claims of Part Three that were the prompt for Parfit's extended defence of the dispensability of the person-notion in the 1999 article. I gave some account of this in the last chapter. How far is it persuasive? Parfit suggests that McDowell makes Reductionism harder to defend than it needs to be by over-stating what needs to be claimed for it – that is, 'that "the flow of experience" must be able to be impersonally understood'. None the less, Parfit finds 'it worth asking whether this requirement can be met'. [459] There follows an argument somewhat different in style from those of *Reasons and Persons*. As I have shown above, it amounts to a setting-out in some detail of what life would be like on reductionist premises – that is, to how beings imagined (for this purpose) by Parfit would get through life. I quoted above his account of how such beings would understand Tenzing's climbing of Everest.[460]

Parfit claims that his INW is a coherent account and 'no worse' than our familiar metaphysical scheme, and so claims to have answered McDowell. [461] Is this plausible? The 'imaginary beings' must be assumed to have the concept of a living thing, even though they lack that of a person. Lacking even that, they would hardly be capable of maintaining their position in the world: I need, if I am going to be safe, to be afraid of a lion. They must also be supposed to have normal powers of vision and so to be capable of watching Tenzing walk up Everest. This suggests that they would inevitably record that a living thing, a human being, a man, Tenzing, climbed Everest. If this is correct, they catch everything obvious about the action. Parfit suggests that lacking the concept of a person their understanding is of a process, 'a climbing of Everest', achieved within a sequence, which may be called 'Tenzing'. This may be 'no worse' than it would be with the concept but, on the Living Thing view, there will seem to be no point in arguing whether it is 'worse' or not. This view goes along with everything obvious and observable in the process, and is – I claim – 'no worse'. I cannot see that there is anything in what Parfit presents here to prompt us to reverse the burden of proof and to conclude that its persuasiveness brings the Living Thing view into question. Here, I find it hard to avoid the conclusion with which I ended my brief treatment of Siderits. This

[459] PARFIT (6) pp.220/21
[460] P.168 above
[461] Op cit p.263

was, effectively, that the more fully the implications of any sort of reductionism are spelled out or presented imaginatively, the less the plausibility it is likely to enjoy.[462]

Wiggins' approach to reductionism, in its application to personal identity, is incidental to his prime concern, which is the individuation and tracking of continuants. Two of his three books on this subject were published earlier than *Reasons and Persons*. The third, *Sameness and Substance Renewed*, has been published only recently. I have referred to it already, and will treat it here as Wiggins' last word on the subject. [463]

Wiggins declares his position to be neo-Aristotelian. [464] It is on this basis that it is set against that of Locke and against the whole strategy of isolating the conscious subject. He remarks on the power for confusion latent in this concern, at least where the subject is taken to be 'a peculiar kind of thing reached by a special kind of abstraction'.[465] His approach is determined by the very concern for identity, taken to be absolute, which we have found Parfit to play down. The argument is extended and elaborate, dealing with personal identity only in conclusion. Here, Wiggins urges that the sortals under which, he says, every identity-claim falls to be considered are, on a proper view, 'human being' and 'person'. He sums up his position as being that of a 'human-being theorist', a labelling plainly at one with 'neo-Aristotelian'. [466]

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[462] As I have been discussing the 1999 article, this may be the most convenient place for considering whether Parfit's retreat from the position of regarding the Buddha as a support is well grounded. Is he right in this? The point is, I think, hardly worth discussing, as Parfit's acquaintance with Buddhism is so plainly limited, and as the Buddha's support, on his original view, amounted to so little. Parfit quotes Vasubandhu, at second hand, to explain this move. My own discussion of Vasubandhu has, I hope, established him as a reductionist rather than an eliminativist (p.97 above) For what it is worth, therefore, I think Parfit is wrong in the 1999 article.
[463] WIGGINS
[464] WIGGINS Preface p.xi
[465] Op cit p.196
[466] WIGGINS p.195

It is fortunate for the present argument that, in pressing his positive assertions, Wiggins deals explicitly with Locke and the impetus deriving from Locke, and also with the fresh opening offered by Shoemaker. His treatment of Locke is by way of a straightforward vindication of Butler's well-known subversion of his account of the person. Butler claims that Locke presupposes what he takes himself to establish. Wiggins takes this riposte as settling the question, and as narrowing the field of choice to a soul account of the person and a human-being account. He elaborates on this, with a demonstration how his two sortal concepts are related. 'Person' is a narrower categorisation than 'human-being' but inseparable from it; ' a person is … a subject of interpretation, a being that both interprets and is interpreted'. [467] This enables him to make use of some of Locke's material. As immature human-beings, we learn how to adjust to experience and to inter-act and co-operate with others. In so doing, 'what stereotype of personhood do we have to catch on to, clearly if not distinctly, and learn to elaborate?' This process of person-construction finds, suggests Wiggins, its last and soldering stage in experiential memory: '… when people do or suffer something, this [the faculty of memory] will express itself on their minds, extend their information, colour their experience and influence their future responses'. [468] Admirers of Locke may be to a degree propitiated, supposes Wiggins, by the resemblance of this account to Locke's own, already quoted: 'A person is a thinking, intelligent being ….'

Wiggins' consideration of Shoemaker's Brown/Brownson example conveys something of a retraction. He records that he was at first impressed by the example: '… the special thing about Brownson was that he was the functional inheritor and continuator of all Brown's vital faculties …. Neither Brown nor Robinson nor Brownson was a brain. But the brain … was the essential nucleus of a person (of a human being) …'.[469] His endorsement of Shoemaker was not without its qualifications and special provisions, but it was clear. His move away from endorsement has come about through reflection on the complications of the example offered which have put it under strain. It was such a strain that prompted Parfit to cut free from inconclusive argument and to declare that identity was not what matters, what matters – at least to Brown – being the perpetuation of a chain of connections and continuities.

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[467] WIGGINS p.196
[468] Op cit p.199
[469] WIGGINS, p 207

Wiggins' position may be seen as directly opposite to this. He reacts against the perplexities deriving from the exposure of identity-presumptions to extreme and destabilising contingencies by holding fast to identity and casting doubt on the procedure. Beyond this, he claims that Parfit's consideration of extreme contingencies – with a view to the conclusion that identity is not what matters – depends vitally on 'the prospective availability of something like the relation R'. [470] Wiggins questions this availability: 'All we really know about R we learn from purported cases of it and the role that R is meant to play – in philosophy'. Wiggins, like McDowell, finds that there is no good reason to credit such a relation – that is, one that will do what is required of it and yet be independent of identity.

More generally, Wiggins brings out the extent, in Parfit's thought, of the departure from the common employment of the notions, 'living thing' and 'human being'. (An instance of such departure, on Wiggins' view, would be the case, already considered, which Parfit may derive from Shoemaker's example: his brain is divided and half-brains inserted in other skulls – say, those of his triplet brothers). Wiggins now suggests that what is presented in this example is better described as Shoemaker's Brown becoming a 'concrete universal'. [471] By this he means that the 'human-being-ness' to be assumed of Brown comes to be replaced, without acknowledgement, by something more abstract that is to be seen only in its realised manifestations. The inadequacy of this as an account of our existence provides the theme of Wiggins' conclusion, with its emphasis on the living thing and on the formation of living things as persons. Here again there is an adaptation of insights from Locke in the taking-over of remarks on person-formation.[472] There is acknowledgment also of Strawson, for his bringing-out, in a well-known paper, of the interpersonal context – not 'inter human-being context' – of this formation.[473] Throughout, Wiggins emphasises natural process and the interaction of persons, one with another, this being a component of the capacity by which we find our way about the world.

If this is persuasive at all, we will - to that extent - have less time for reductionism of any kind. The short point is that a great deal would have to be given up, or at least made

[470] WIGGINS. P.227
[471] Op cit p.229
[472] WIGGINS p 234
[473] STRAWSON P.(2)

vulnerable to be given up, in an acceptance of Reductionism. There is correspondingly less need for close analysis on the ground that Parfit has marked out. Like McDowell, with his shrug of the shoulders, Wiggins is inclined to put aside such ingenuities as Teletransportation, perhaps with the concession that on his own terms Parfit is hard to argue down.

Cassam takes an approach rather different from that of McDowell and Wiggins. It is, however, effectively complementary. In an article published not long after *Reasons and Persons*, he suggested that Parfit's choice not to deal fully with Strawson's 'Kantian' contentions may have been ill-judged.[474] He questions whether Kant, properly considered, has to be that opponent of Reductionism that Parfit takes him to be. Though I have followed Parfit in leaving Strawson's contentions aside, it is worth considering Cassam's observations. He points to the distinction of (3) and (5) in Parfit's outline of Reductionism.[475] It will be recalled that (3) has it that a person 'just consists in the existence of a brain and body' and (5) that a person 'is an entity that is distinct from a brain and body'. Both, Parfit claims, are true, prompting a comparison of 'person' and 'nation', a nation being an entity that does not exist apart from its citizens and its territory.

Rather than pursue this, Cassam sketches out a version of reductionism that might be called 'explicative' rather than 'eliminative'. This has it that the retention of certain notions is needed for explanation. I might accept Parfit's (3), yet hold that ascription of experiences to a person is essential to explain unity of consciousness and so to explain what a subject of experience is. As we have seen, this is not Parfit's reductionism. Is this last therefore 'eliminativist'? It seems not: 'Reductionists do not deny that people exist…. This is true because of the way we talk.' [476] Of this assertion, Cassam makes what is surely the telling criticism that 'the justification for our thinking and talking in this way cannot be that we do so think and talk'.

Cassam now proposes:

[474] CASSAM (1)
[475] See section 56 above for these components of Reductionism
[476] PARFIT(3) p.223

> Suppose that the Kantian argument is sound, and that it is provides a way of combining (3) and (5). Given that this combination is precisely what the Reductionist wants, why not regard Kant's argument as deepening the basic Reductionist insight rather than refuting it?

This 'deepening' is achievable because the Kantian and the Reductionist are taken to be working at different levels and on different questions. Cassam supposes that we regard a given mental life from outside it. We observe the thinking of self-ascriptive thoughts and the place of these thoughts in sustaining the notion of independent enduring objects. This does not mean that – from outside – we need ascribe these self-ascriptive thoughts to subjects. In this, we are, as it were, Reductionists. We can acknowledge that this impersonal conception could not be adopted from <u>inside</u> the life. Here we put ourselves into the Kantian position.

Parfit's recommendation of (3) and (5) is more problematic. He writes:

> Most of us are Reductionists about nations. We would accept the following claims: Nations exist. Ruritania does not exist, but France does. Though nations exist, a nation is not an entity that exists separately, apart from its citizens and its territory. We would accept
>
> (6) A nation's existence just involves the existence of its citizens, living together in certain ways, on its territory.
>
> Some claim
>
> (7) A nation just <u>is</u> these citizens and this territory.
>
> Others claim

> (8) A nation is an entity that is distinct from its citizens and its territory.
>
> We may believe that (8) and (6) are not inconsistent….

If (8) and (6) are compatible, should we conclude, as Parfit would have us, that (3) and (5) are also compatible? Not even those most concerned to resist the view of the nation attributed to 'most of us' would claim that the nation is a living thing. Its comparability to the person will be found difficult to catch, even by those persuaded that it is in some sense more than its parts. Parfit's claim seems open to attack from two sides. On one side, we may doubt if it follows that we should be reductionist in the case of persons, when we are reductionist in the case of nations. On the other side, we may not be persuaded that we are, or should be, reductionists in the case of nations. Quite apart from its citizens, a nation may be an object of devotion, or a ground for self-sacrifice. It is possible to love a city or a country, yet to despise its human components.[477]

In an article which followed this, Cassam pursues his scrutiny of Parfit by way of limited close observations. [478] He now questions whether the propositions with which Parfit defines Reductionism hang together. As we have seen, the necessity of their connection is an important part of Parfit's claim. By way of challenge to this, Cassam denies that the postulation of a Cartesian ego is incompatible with supposing that personhood consists of other facts, of which an impersonal description might be possible. As he puts it: ' The basis of the claim that a person is a spiritual substance need not be the assertion that the concept of a person is that of a soul, any more than someone who claims that a person is his brain is committed to thinking of this as a conceptual truth'. On the assumption of a Cartesian ego, why should this, any more than the *ātman*, or – a different case – the brain, be what personhood amounts to? As he declares: ' .. from the fact that the survival of one's brain is necessary and sufficient for

[477] An example of this is to be found in Georges Clemenceau, French Prime Minister in the latter half of the First World War. Keynes remarked of him: 'He had one illusion – France; and one disillusion, mankind, including Frenchmen …'. See KEYNES. Keynes' distinction lends itself naturally to dramatisation. The first three acts of Shakespeare's play, *Coriolanus,* make up an extended debate about 'Rome'. The hero, Marcius is the target of a question which catches Parfit's view to perfection: 'What is the city but the people?' Is this a devastating point of self-evident force? Or is 'Rome' much more than an ignoble rank-and-file?

[478] CASSAM (2)

one's survival, it does not follow that persons are of the kind 'human brain'. The same point might be made of the kind, 'immaterial soul'.

Cassam's approach is one of incidental criticism, by way of advancing his own positive assertions. Central to these is an assertion of 'animalism'. By 'animalism', Cassam means 'a view of persons which claims that a person is an animal of a certain kind, and that it is necessary and sufficient for the persistence of a person that the animal with which he or she is identical persists'. [479] It needs no labouring that this is in line with what I called 'the Living Thing Criterion'. It makes of 'person' a classificatory notion. Its successful assertion would be a challenge to Parfit.

The assertion of animalism prompts a further reference to the supposed analogy between persons and nations. Cassam continues:

> … the Reductionist needs to show that thinking of persons as like nations is better than the best substantialist conception …… this is not a challenge which Reductionism can meet, once it is recognised that the best version of Non-Reductionism is not Cartesian, but animalist.

Cassam relies on this contrast between 'person' and 'nation' in criticising Parfit's account of indeterminacy. He takes the case of Parfit's Physical Spectrum, it the middle of which, it will be recalled, it may be impossible to say whether or not identity persists. Parfit would claim that Non-Reductionists who are animalists will be baffled by this difficulty. Cassam, however, claims that many Non-Reductionists would be willing to accept indeterminacy in exceptional cases, preferring this – along with Parfit – to the drawing of an arbitrary line. He claims: 'A situation in which it is indeterminate whether an animal identical with me survives is preferable to one in which it is beyond dispute that no animal identical with me survives.' [480] Other Non-Reductionists would question Parfit's writing in to his example the stipulation that all the relevant facts are known, so as to anticipate, and rebut, the claim that a dividing line exists within the

[479] CASSAM(2) p.17
[480] CASSAM(2) p.28.

Spectrum, even if it cannot be found: '…. it is not really conceivable that we should know how to answer every question except the question of identity'.

Cassam then comes, in his turn, to the Brown/Brownson example. Brownson is clearly Brown on both of Parfit's Criteria. Enough of Brown's brain persists, and psychological continuity and connectedness are ensured. Parfit, as he frequently tells us, is concerned not with identity but with mattering, but he seems to be committed to this conclusion if forced to one. For the animalist, Brown is not Brownson, as they are different animals, and because the answer to any identity-query has to be ' the one which accords with the nature of persons as they are in nature'. Cassam supposes a Parfitian response to this on the lines that it would be irrational of Brown, on the eve of the operation, not to see that the relation with the future Brownson carries on 'what matters' to him. A riposte to this response might be that, to the animal, what matters is the survival of the animal. To this, a counter-riposte might be, from Brown, that even on animalist assumptions he is a person in intimate association with an animal, which fact gives him a concern for the perpetuation of the person.[481] What this supposed debate should suggest is that 'mattering' is less obvious in its meaning than Parfit seems to appreciate, although he relies on it heavily. For this and other reasons, I will consider 'mattering' more fully below.

Both McDowell and Wiggins criticise reductionism, explicitly or not, from within a broadly Aristotelian tradition. McDowell conveys this with his closing reference to 'ourselves as rational animals'. It is with a rather different purpose that Cassam defends what he calls 'the materialist conception of self-consciousness' in a book, *Self and World*, published in 1997. [482] The argument is summarised, in part, as being that 'the existence of persons is a substantial fact about the world, and that it is not possible to give a complete description of reality without claiming that persons exist'.[483] It was this argument by Cassam, presented earlier elsewhere, which led Parfit to abandon the IRC of *Reasons and Persons.* After developing his main argument, which I will not try to

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[481] For the words 'in intimate association with an animal', one might substitute 'by way of the classification of an animal'. It is a nice question how far this would weaken the supposed counter-riposte.
[482] CASSAM(3)
[483] Taken from the description of Cassam's argument on the cover of the paperback edition of the book

consider here, Cassam comes to Reductionism. [484] He returns to the question of the compatibility of Reductionism and Neo-Kantianism, and to the distinction, already set out, between observation from the outside and that from an internal perspective. He now goes further than before in considering objections to arguments for their compatibility. He seems more inclined than he was before to find them telling. One such objection is that the external 'sideways-on' perspective – that is, observation from the outside,

> - fails to explain the relations between thoughts and experiences in a way which fully captures their contents, since thinkings of I-thoughts will be among those physical and mental events which, by being interrelated, constitute a particular life.[485]

There follows an argument of much complexity. At its centre is an account of mental processes characteristic of 'Functionalism', taking this to be 'the view that mental states are individuated by reference to their place in a complex causal network'. [486] Cassam invokes Shoemaker's view of Functionalism as drawing on the concept of a person: a mental state works with other mental states of the <u>same</u> person.[487] He brings forward an objection of Parfitian character to this view, to the effect that the elements within this complex work with others in what is functionally the same space, which space will be marked out by its being the locus of the appropriate effects. If this is right, the specification of 'the same person' seems to lose its foundation. This is not, however, all there is to be said. Cassam continues:

> .. while the content of a person's belief or intention will depend to a certain extent upon all .. preceding states, there will often be a particular preceding state

[484] On Cassam's own account (op cit, p 3 footnote): 'My main concern is not with the question of whether self-consciousness requires that each of us is a corporeal or physical object, but with the question of whether it is a necessary condition of self-consciousness that we are presented to ourselves as physical objects among physical objects. It is a further question whether it follows from the fact that one's thinking self is presented to oneself as corporeal that it is corporeal'.
[485] CASSAM (3) p.184
[486] Op cit p.193
[487] Op cit p.193

> … It is of that earlier state that the current state is the "successor state"[488]

To explain this connection, Cassam assumes extension through time. Only on the modelling of this extension on the lives of subjects is it possible to capture the idea that one element in the space prompts another. This appears to meet the object which Cassam has set himself: an explanation of the way 'we are presented to ourselves as physical objects among physical objects'. It seems to go with this that 'it is not possible to give a complete description of reality without claiming that persons exist'. To the extent that this is persuasive, as I take it to be, it will be telling in rebuttal of Parfit.

82. Recapitulation

The argument has become complicated, and it will be helpful to recapitulate. In the argument to date, we have been concerned with various accounts of the subject. Four of these have been prominent:

(1) The spiritual substance, the *ātman* of Indian religion and the soul of Christians. In Parfit's presentation, it appears as 'the Cartesian soul'. In Locke's account, 'the soul' co-operates with 'the man' and 'the person' in the constitution of the Lockean subject. It has been widely held to be the bearer, or vital constituent, of personal identity.

As the carrier of personal identity, this is disposed of, at least to Locke's satisfaction, in these often quoted words from Chapter 27 of Book II of the *Essay*: 'I think no body, could he be sure that the Soul of Heliogabalus were in one of his Hogs, would yet say that Hog were a Man or Heliogabalus'. Parfit goes further in finding no reason to credit any such entity as the soul.

(2) The Lockean view, the defining characteristic of which is the differentiation of 'the man' and 'the person' and the attribution of a persisting identity to the person distinct from that of the man. The identity of the person, so cut loose, may become

[488] CASSAM (3) p.194

contentious and perplexing in extreme contingencies, in the invention of which Locke sets an example. [489] Even in such cases as that of Brown/Brownson, on which views will differ sharply, Brown is either perpetuated or he is not.

The polemical configuration of Parfit's position is to some degree one of reaction to the Lockean view.

(3) The Reductionist account set out in Part Three of *Reasons and Persons*. Parfit offers an escape from the *impasses* to which Lockean reflection seems to lead, in finding that identity is not what matters: the perplexing cases to which the Lockean account gives rise are found to be empty as questions; in any one case, such as the choice between Brown or not-Brown, all the relevant facts might be known, leaving no more to be said. If, in any one case of this kind, there had to be an answer, more than one view might be sustained. Even if one such view had polemical advantages over the others, it would make more sense to grant that identity may not be determinate.

In the course of this chapter, I have set out objections to accepting Parfit's version of reductionism. I have done this, in part, by pressing the greater cogency of the remaining option.

(4) A view of the subject which finds some grounding in Aristotle, and in support of which I have drawn on McDowell, Wiggins and Cassam. This has it that the subject of concern is first and foremost and essentially a living thing with systemic unity. On this view, Locke's distinction of 'the man' and 'the person' may retain its point and utility, but only in so far as 'person' is a classification of 'man'.

We can see from this listing that the first account is subverted by the second, and the second by the third. Locke has cut out the soul from any effective role in the assurance of personal identity, and Parfit has found Locke's account to buckle under the pressure of extreme contingencies. Parfit's account is then, I maintain, shown to be inadequate by a clear statement of the fourth.

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[489] The Prince and the Cobbler referred to above. See LOCKE p.340.

From the Buddhist point of view, the elimination of the first account is welcome. The second and – much more strongly – the third accounts go well with the ‘weak’ view of the subject, as I have distinguished it above. If our conclusion is that only the fourth is viable, the Buddhist advocate will be forced back on the ‘strong’ view. We have seen that the ‘strong’ view is implied everywhere in the early texts, but the problem of its compatibility with the explicitly stated ‘weak’ view, and with the characteristic Buddhist assertions that go with this, will then persist. The identity problem will remain unresolved.

83. Parfit’s further thoughts

I should not end this consideration of Parfit’s Reductionism without drawing attention to a shift of presentation in the 1999 article. (I have already mentioned another shift, the conception, which Parfit is now inclined to admit, of the phased sortal). This is the careful marking-off of Parfit’s version of reductionism from others, which he calls ‘hyper-reductionist’. [490] A similar distinction is to be found in an article published in 1995. There, Parfit responds to the objection that his version of reductionism would make all facts to be facts about fundamental particles:

> We are not claiming that, whenever there are facts at different levels, it is always the lower level facts which matter ….Relative to the facts at some lower level, the higher level fact is … merely conceptual. Such conceptual facts cannot be rationally or morally important. [491]

Identity-claims – to the effect that Brownson is or is not Brown – are a case of what is not ‘rationally or morally important’.

[490] PARFIT (6) p.218: ‘According to some Reductionists, such as Bernard Williams and Judith Thomson, each of us is a human body. This view is not, strictly, reductionist, but that is because it is hyper-reductionist: it reduces persons to bodies in so strong a way that it doesn’t even distinguish between them.’
[491] PARFIT (5) p.13

In sum, what Parfit now emphasises is a conceptual entity, the concept being one of a fact made up of other facts - ‘lower level’ facts, to employ his own distinction. [492] This is no substantial novelty in his thought, as the same emphasis is at the centre of his first presentation of Reductionism, but it stands out more distinctly in this restatement, where it is cut free from the extended critique of Locke pervading *Reasons and Persons*. The difference between this and the Living Thing view will be evident. It is well brought out by one of Wiggins’ observations. Wiggins remarks that the biological scientist, Professor J Z Young had arrived ‘… at a conception of identity and persistence through time that is strikingly similar, where living things are concerned, to the neo-Aristotelian conception that I defend’. Young did this ‘in response to all the facts that confront the biological scientist’. Wiggins quotes the following from Young:

> “The essence of a living thing is that it consists of atoms of the ordinary chemical elements we have listed, caught up into the living system and made part of it for a while. The living activity takes them up and organizes them in its characteristic way. The life of a man consists essentially in the activity he imposes upon that stuff … it is only by virtue of this activity that the shape and organization of the whole is maintained.”

Wiggins goes on to remark on ‘the recognition [since his own first publication] in the philosophical community at large of the persisting conceptual importance … of Aristotle’s biology and philosophy of life’, and finds it welcome. [493]

The stress we find here on the organisation of forms of life contrasts sharply with Parfit’s apparent satisfaction with a categorisation of ourselves as consisting of ‘brain and body’. [494] In the 1999 article, restating his whole position, he declares:

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[492] Yet not to be reduced to these ‘lower level’ facts, or to one of them – for instance the body – by definition. Here is the difference between Parfit’s view and that of the hyper-reductionists or, as Siderits has it, the ‘eliminativists’.
[493] For all this, see WIGGINS: Preface p.xi
[494] I remarked on the oddity of this expression above. See p.150 above.

> Our existence consists in the existence of a body, and the occurrence of various interrelated mental processes and events. Our identity over time consists in physical and/or psychological continuity. [495]

I should by now made it sufficiently clear what I take this to leave out. The alternative which I have set out in this chapter, prompted in its expression by Wiggins, is that ‘human being’ should be taken to be a classification of ‘living thing’ or, at a ‘lower’ level, of Young’s ‘living system’, and ‘person’ to be a bracket within ‘living thing’.

84. Parfit’s ‘what matters’, and other matters

I must now address more fully the question of what it is to ‘matter’, as this has an important place within Parfit’s thinking, and because it seems insufficient to take the notion to be clear, simply from the contexts in which Parfit brings it up - for instance, in suggesting that identity is not what matters.

There are at least three ways in which we might find something to matter:

> (1) it may be the point of a subject of dispute. If I find that discussion is losing its focus, I might say, ‘it is X, not Y, that matters’, in the hope of directing attention to X;
>
> (2) it may be what is of particular concern or advantage. I might say, ‘what matters is that I keep my job;
>
> (3) what matters may be what is of importance generally or intrinsically. I might say, ‘what matters is the general good’, or ‘what matters is that the human race keeps going’.

[495] PARFIT(6) p.218

All these employments are to be found in Parfit, often together, drawn out by his interest in the concern for survival. He presumes that it is this that is most worth discussing. He also takes the clear-headed to set more store by the perpetuation of chains of (their) psychological connections and continuities than by that of their identities. These leads to his claim that such perpetuation is of intrinsic importance and that it is what ought to matter to everyone. There need be no confusion in this, but it is a weakness that the three senses are hardly distinguished. What matters in the first sense comes to be assimilated to what matters in the third. In cases where perpetuation is 'what matters' – as the point of attention – Parfit seems to find it also the point of prime importance – that is, it is what we should care about.

This is surely too easy. It leaves Parfit open to a very obvious challenge, which cuts to the basis of mattering. We may be asked: why should perpetuation, by way of Relation R or otherwise, be of concern? Why does it matter to me? The challenge may go further: why does anything matter? Where is the mattering of mattering?

Parfit is open to this challenge because of his failure to make an important distinction, which the questions just suggested should have conveyed: one between what is grounded in instinct and what is held to as the outcome of a process of reasoning. These come together in the case of going–on, though they remain distinguishable and the distinction is important. The concern to go on – that is, to perpetuate or preserve oneself, is primarily instinctual. This is not to deny that I may also judge my going-on to be desirable: I may be happy on the whole and judge that it is good to maximise happiness; I may have a project in hand, which I wish to complete and which, along with my wishing, I judge to be for the future general good.

A notable weakness in Parfit is his disregard of the instinctual. While it is hardly deniable that the concern to go on has both an instinctual and a rational basis, Parfit probes and ponders 'what matters', as if the mattering, or falling short from mattering, of going-on were a subject of rational determination only. This must be an imperfect view of something at least largely instinctual. When I find myself in danger, I run. In a more familiar context, my desire to go on living is likely to be paramount, and to be recognised as such, even in desperate circumstances. This is not a matter of calculation.

What I am pointing to is an excessively rationalist stress in Parfit's presentation, which goes with a corresponding disregard of the 'animal' side of human life. Animals, including human animals, have instincts. In Part Three, Parfit discusses the wish to persist, whether through the perpetuation of identity or otherwise, in a way that reflects a disregard of this. This makes it difficult for him to bring up, and to try to answer some intrusive questions: Why should I wish to go on? What is good about my going on? Why should I care about the perpetuation of 'my' memories?' The answers to – or evasions of – these questions surely has to be, in the first place, that it is of the nature of an animal to strive to persist and, if self-aware, to wish to persist. While I may well be able to give reasons for wishing to persist, such considerations will be secondary. I seek to persist because I am what I am.

In pointing to this, I am suggesting that Parfit has a rationalistic habit of mind. The tendency of this is to render those who have it less able to take proper account of the 'non-rational' (not 'irrational') and the instinctual; also less able to grant that there are areas of life with no place for rational calculation. Here is a misapplication of reason, which may issue – as, I am suggesting, it sometimes does in the present case – in something obtuse. [496] This is a habit of mind which goes readily with the utilitarian predisposition to be registered in Parfit's approach throughout *Reasons and Persons*, though more in Parts Two and Four than in Part Three, and in the later work. This finds two ringing declarations. One is from the 1999 article, 'I believe that if sentient beings suffer, that is not only bad for them. It is bad, or what some call bad, period'. [497] The other is Parfit's endorsement of Sidgwick's judgment that 'the destruction of mankind would be by far the greatest of all conceivable crimes'. This is because such destruction would cut out the possibility of happiness in the lives of future generations. [498]

Neither of these judgments, it hardly needs saying, is <u>peculiarly</u> utilitarian: the former, at least, is thoroughly compatible with a central Buddhist emphasis. [499] I quote them here

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[496] The rationalistic is to the reasonable as the legalistic is to the equitable. I am concerned to identify a disabling rigidity, perhaps a professional deformation.
[497] PARFIT (6) p.258.
[498] PARFIT(3) p.454. Parfit sems to assume that the aggregate of such happiness would outweigh that of misery.
[499] The objectionable quality of *duḥkha* is taken as self-evident. This insight is at the heart of the *āryasatyāni.* See p.38 above.

for their very plain expression of Benthamite presuppositions. My suggestion is that, while there may be no necessary connection between the two, the rationalistic bias will often be seen to go happily with recourse to the Benthamite calculus, and that it does so in the case of Parfit.

Here is a view of how things are, and of how moral enterprise ought to be directed, which is conspicuous in Part Four, where it is plain that Parfit sees well-being as a quantum, open to be registered in Benthamite terms. I refer, in particular, to the chapter entitled 'The Repugnant Conclusion', on which I touched briefly in Chapter Five. [500] There, Parfit envisages the possibility of the modest excess of happiness over misery to be found in the members of a very large population exceeding as an aggregate the greater excess to be found in the less numerous members of one much smaller. Application of the calculus might then suggest that we should favour the former state of affairs, even to the extent of being obliged to bring it about. [501]

What this example brings out is the wide distinction of the Benthamite smack to be found sometimes in Parfit from the emphases of virtue ethics, both Buddhist and Western. Proponents of virtue ethics will happily concur that the more well-being, and the less pain, the better. What will seem odd from their perspective is the seemingly unthinking recourse to quantifiability. It should have been evident from what I suggested in Chapter Two and elsewhere that the well-being of a living thing is a matter of evaluation irreducible to calculation. This should be no controversial view of the matter, as the same is the case with the purely physical well-being of a living thing – that is, with its health. Healthiness is one of the attributes of a system – that is, here, of a living thing - and, while we can say that someone is in better or worse health than he was a year ago, it would be odd to venture to 'count up' that healthiness, as if writing a bill, and to contribute it to a larger total. It would be odd because living things cannot sensibly be so regarded. [502]

[500] Page 195 above
[501] This is, I think, a fair account of what the argument of Chapter 17 of *Reasons and Persons* comes to; I do not present it as an adequate summary of something quite complex.
[502] I am not concerned to deny that a Government statistician might usefully do just what I find to be odd. The statistician has special purposes of his own.

The limitation which I have been discussing should not be over-stated. A reading of Appendix I to *Reasons and Persons* should be enough to show that Parfit's general allegiance to a utilitarian approach is no simple matter. Its complexities are analysed with subtlety. In the next chapter, I will recall what I have said about Part Two of the work and make use of it to support the approach to Buddhist ethics which I conclude by recommending. It is with this in mind that I recall my brief mention of Matilal's judgment at the end of Chapter Five. Matilal suggested that there was a gulf between Buddhist presumptions and concerns and those of Parfit, such that the Buddhist advocate should not look to that way of doing philosophy for fundamental support. This suggeston, which I found persuasive, seems all the more plausible with an appreciation of the extent of Parfit's utilitarianism. It may well be that Parfit can provide incidental support, by way of insights and analysis which may be open to appropriation. But our conclusion seems to be that this is the limit of it.

85. Unfinished business?

Reasons and Persons was published nearly 25 years ago. While the argument of Part Three seems self-sufficient to a degree which would have permitted Part Three's separate publication, the closer scrutiny I have offered above may have brought out its incompleteness. This is evident in a certain scrappiness, both (I am aware) of comment on my own part and (I believe) of Parfit's own presentation. This is much more obvious when his work on personal identity is viewed as a whole, extending to his respose to critical appraisal. In my own remarks on this, I have suggested that there is very little by way of retraction, but a notable reordering. This has, I think been for the better, but Parfit has seemed not to appreciate the extent to which his argument has acquired a different look. The two modifications discussed here, which were offered in the 1999 article, are instances of this.

All this suggests that Parfit's views on personal identity and matters related to it are still developing. This is, of course, unsurprising. It is also true, to repeat a point just made, that his reaction to his critics has been notably dogged, so much so that I have suggested above that the effect of a main argumentative strand in the 1999 article has been to weaken his case. [503] None the less, I have come to find the coherence and completeness of Part Three and of what has followed it to be less than it seemed on a

[503] Page 221 above.

first reading. If I am right in this, it seems not implausible to attribute it to the natural awkwardness of presenting a position which is still, to some degree, taking shape. I am strengthened in this view by one of Parfit's endnotes to the 1999 article, in which he refers to 'a projected book *The Metaphysics of the Self*'. [504] The comprehensiveness of this title suggests that what I have come to find, in Parfit's existing work , to be too little co-ordinated might be brought into a higher unity.

86. Conclusions.

Little seems to be required by way of conclusion. I have considered Parfit's claims for 'quasi-memory', concluding that no impregnable account could be offered of an identity-free substratum of mental life. I remarked on the width of meaning of the term 'person', and of other denotations of the subject, and suggested that Parfit was not always successful in specifying the object of his consideration. I also questioned the adequacy of his treatment of apparent alternatives to Reductionism. I suggested that his argument was over-precipitate in its ruling out of Non-Reductionist conceptions of the person. In broad concurrence with McDowell, Wiggins and Cassam, I argued that there was an alternative to Reductionism left unconsidered by Parfit. I suggested (following Parfit's own usage) that this might be expressed by way of a Living Thing Criterion. I found this approach to be characterised in Aristotelian terms by McDowell and Wiggins and as 'animalism' by Cassam. I concluded that it was not only an alternative for consideration, but also a persuasive option. It is this which I have sought to present, by way of positive response to the question this chapter has addressed.

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[504] PARFIT(6) note 22

CHAPTER SEVEN

Conclusions

87. The identity problem as it stands: how helpful has Parfit been?

The identity problem is a problem within a problem. In its 'inner' dimension, it is one of the 'weak' and 'strong' notions of the subject, asserted or taken for granted within the Buddhist record. The 'weak'notion is open to the criticisms attendant on all 'reductionist' notions. The 'strong' notion escapes these, but seems even less compatible than the 'weak'notion with the supposition of rebirth. In this supposition and in that of the interwoven notion of *karman*, we find the 'outer' dimension of the problem. *Karman* and rebirth are fundamental to the Buddhist understanding of the motivation of action, and also of regard for other beings and for the future. In this combination of 'inner' and 'outer', the problem becomes one of morality, bearing on all the concerns of morality.

The arguments of *Reasons and Persons* bear largely on this complex of difficulties. In Part Three, the parallel between Parfit's characteristic assertions and those of the Buddhist proponent is close - closer than Parfit himself appreciates. This is helpful to the Buddhist proponent, as fresh and telling arguments are available to him. Even so, the help to be found in Part Three has its limitations. I spelled these out in Chapter Five, and set out in Chapter Six some objections, which I found to be telling, to Parfit's whole procedure. I then turned to Part Two and found it possible to draw from it a line of thought well fitted to be used, though with caution, in support of the Buddhist insistence on disinterested concern. [505] This was an unexpected finding, in part because it cut against Parfit's own presumption of a Buddhist bias towards self-interest.

The complex argument which I must now bring to a conclusion has had within it two separate, though often connected, strands. It has been concerned with how things are,

[505] Caution, because Parfit's argument for consistency is two-edged. See p.191 above.

and also with what matters. Consideration of the first leads very easily, perhaps inevitably, to a shift of attention to the second. In Chapter Four, the Middling Claim came naturally to mind in the course of discussion of the straightforward Going-on Claim and of Buddhaghosa's claim ('neither the same, nor different'). The first two of these are concerned with how things are; the Middling Claim reflects this concern, but embraces what we might, or should, care about. In Chapter Five, discussion of the Extreme and Moderate Claims set out in Part Three of *Reasons and Persons* gave rise naturally to the Minimal Claim. This resembles the Middling Claim in its focus on concern.

These two strands have been long drawn-out, which is why I offer this summary. I ended Chapter Four, dealing with rebirth, inconclusively. I then picked up in Chapter Five the discussion of future prospects broken off in Chapter Four, in the course of dealing with Parfit's Part Three and, in respect of Paul Williams' contribution, of dealing with his Part Two. I will now resume it again in considering the Middling Claim.

88. The Middling Claim: what is 'as good as' survival

The Middling Claim is to the effect that, in the succession of B to A, there might be something of A about B such as to be 'as good as' the unrealisable state of B 'being' A, so that we can reasonably give up concern about B 'being' A.[506] I have shown that Part Three of *Reasons and Persons* found a carrying-on into another life to be at least intelligible: chains of psychological continuity and connectedness may remain in being, and be sustained there by some abnormal cause. In what follows, I will set aside the doubts cast by Chapter Six and, for the sake of the argument, let pass as intelligible certain instances of perpetuation. My object will be to bring out what might be 'as good as' survival and – what is closely related to this - what it might be to 'matter'. I will be concerned with mattering as a motivating factor in morality – that is, with how determinations of importance, or of mattering in other sense, may be a spur to action or abstention.

[506] See section 49

Admit, therefore, the case of someone living in the future, with at least very much of his or her psychological continuity and connectedness having its derivation from someone living now. This is clearly close to the account of perpetuation offered by Buddhaghosa and considered above, in treating of the Buddhist commentators' restatement of the Buddhist understanding of rebirth. It fits with Buddhaghosa's account to take such a man or woman as an instance of an entity 'neither the same as nor different'. To meet the Buddhist case, the chain would have to be one of the elements of character and fate as much as those of memory. This, by itself, makes for no great difference from Parfit, as Parfit admits such other continuities. [507]

Assume for the moment that Buddhaghosa was right in understanding such succession to be what the Buddha meant in such declarations as, 'at that time Sariputta was X'; assume that his glossing of these words is no retreat, but a proper elucidation. If we follow him in this, we will believe that an entity, 'neither the same nor different', is such a perpetuation in the Buddha's distinctive sense of an entity made by *karman*. This will be the case, despite the difference of parentage and upbringing, and along with an almost certain ignorance of this 'descent' on the part of the successor being. [508] Call this Buddhaghosa's view. It is clearly one of what I have called 'going-on' and, as such, it is outside the ambit of the Middling Claim. I bring it up in this context on account of what appears to be its openness to be restated – against Buddhaghosa's intention, no doubt - in terms of what would be 'as good as' going on.

Turn then to Parfit's view. This is founded on explicit disregard of 'going on'. It is the view that a future entity has much in him of the psychological make-up of someone now alive – that is, of those many chains of psychological continuity and connectedness that Parfit finds to constitute personhood. If we are content with Parfit's methodology, and find conceivable the counter-factual extremities brought about by 'scanning' and the like, we may find this constitution conceivable. This future entity will not be 'me', if it is my future that is in question, as he (or she) will be a different – Lockean – 'man'.

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[507] PARFIT(3) section 78 and elsewhere

[508] I repeat that I am considering only rebirth as a human being. Rebirth as an animal, which the Buddhist tradition admits, seems yet more baffling than this. Rebirth in hellish state is, in contrast, much easier to understand. When we are told that X has been reborn in hell, it seems at least clear enough who or what is now in hell. Rebirth in heaven is more complicated than this, as it may involve something like appointment to a pre-existing role. See above, especially Chapters One and Four.

He will have his own life as a living thing, with all the characteristics engendered by parentage and upbringing. Though my identity will not be preserved in his existence, this existence is 'as good as' its preservation. Here is what I have called the Middling Claim. Call this Parfit's view. Its difference from Buddhaghosa's will be apparent.

Parfit's view prompts two questions. The first is the one raised by Parfit himself: do I regard this relationship as being 'as good as' the perpetuation of myself? Is this 'what matters'? The second bears on the way I regard this future individual: do I care about his or her well-being? If I do not, should I try to develop such concern? How far will my belief in his succession to myself govern my conduct now, and if so how? Is this, in a rather different sense, what matters? Parfit has argued at length that it is this perpetuation that 'matters'. I must now say how far I find this claim persuasive.

It will be helpful, in making this judgment, if we consider, first, the case of another living thing similar, in respect of parentage, upbringing and all <u>external</u> circumstances to the entity described by Parfit. This entity lacks, however, those chains of psychological continuity and connectedness attributable to myself, and of course has others 'in lieu'. That is as much to say that he lacks memories, character and fate of a kind in which I might have an interest. He is, we may say, just one out of a myriad of future beings, remarkable only for his partial resemblance to an entity in which I may have a special interest. I now ask myself how I should regard this contrasting entity. The answer is, surely, that I can have no reason for <u>special</u> concern for, or any interest in, one who is neither more nor less than a future being, one out of billions who will live after my death. How could anyone feel otherwise?

When I turn back to the entity supposed on Parfit's view, which the one just considered resembles in his external features, I may ask myself how the case differs. Why should this entity's possession of some of the factors of continuity with myself be a ground for <u>special</u> regard? There seems no reason why I should be more concerned with M, one future human being out of many, whose bare existence, and just that, may safely be postulated, than with N, like M in all respects but in his possession of a character or chain of habits and so a fate, all attributable to me. Of this fact – unless he is close to enlightenment – he will be quite ignorant. Pure chance, I may reflect, along with natural limits on the range of possibilities, may be relied on to produce people like me in many

respects, and I will care no more for them than for the rest. Why should it be different when the resemblance is brought about not by chance but by some 'abnormal cause'?

When we go back to the subject marked out by Buddhaghosa's view, an entity postulated as being 'neither the same nor different', the conclusion forced on us will be the same. Here the resemblance is attributable not to some Parfitian 'abnormal cause' but to karmic process – on a traditional view of *karman*. The outcome, however, seems to be the same. Why, in this case, should resemblance be a cause of concern, or a motivating factor, any more than it should be when it has been brought about by the means envisaged by Parfit? Buddhaghosa's expression of what is involved looks very much like an admission of non-identity, whether or not he would have granted that. Where, therefore, is the significant difference between this case and the one just discussed? I conclude that Buddhaghosa's restatement of the earlier form of the rebirth-claim cannot be saved by its being understood in terms of 'mattering'. Parfit's innovatory suggestion does nothing to rescue it from the general objections to the Buddhist rebirth-claim brought out above.

It may help, at this point, to recall a comparable case from quite another philosophical tradition. The point of concern was summed up in the lines quoted above from *De Rerum Natura*. Here we find Lucretius considering the possibility of the atoms composing the subject being restored, by pure chance (we assume), long after the death of that subject to their original configuration. Lucretius declares, and surely persuasively, that this is not survival. Here, too, the question of mattering comes up. If I am that subject and a good Epicurean, will I feel that this possibility, should it be realised, is 'as good as' my survival? It is hard to suppose that I will. I might have a benevolent interest in that future being's prosperity and happiness, but why should this interest be special or unusually intense simply on account of a chance reconfiguration of atoms? Lucretius was surely right, both in ruling out continuity explicitly and in ruling out concern by implication.

Here we may be able to see – if ruefully – at least the <u>polemical</u> merits of the very simple statements of the rebirth-claim to be found in the early texts and in the popular, non-canonical literature. I have in mind the claim that A was B or that C will be D. It is in such instances that we find a basis for interest and concern – that is, a motivating

factor of a self-interested kind. If I am to 'go on' in this literal sense, and if the nature of my going-on is to be determined karmically, I have an excellent motive for governing my actions appropriately. The problem, I hope I have shown, is that this full-blooded claim is one of which it is impossible to make sense. This has been dealt with at length above. One living thing cannot 'become' another, and any account of such becoming in terms of rebirth runs up against that impossibility.

How would an advocate of Buddhaghosa's claim seek to rebut this conclusion? His best course might be to do so by way of definition. The karmic element, the ongoing flow, is what is <u>meant by</u> the person, the object of concern. [509] It is here that all happens: action and consequence, the perfection or degradation of character. This is a good answer, as it is open to no rebuttal from within the Buddhist tradition. It is however still open to the riposte that it has no motivating force. Why should I care about what happens a long way 'downstream', long after my own departure?

We seem, then, to be driven to admit the defeat of the Buddhist claim, both in its canonical statement and in its restatement in the commentaries, and also, at least in this respect, in that of the alternative expressed in terms of 'mattering'. From this standpoint, when we contemplate future individuals, it can only be with an equality of indifference.

89. <u>How it stands with Buddhist ethics: 'Buddhist' and 'Buddhistic'</u>

Our conclusion, at this late stage of my argument, can only be decidedly negative. We have found both the 'inner' and the 'outer' dimensions of the problem perplexing, and I am now suggesting also that there is little profit in the shift of attention to 'what matters' from 'how things are'. It follows that that I must consider how it stands with Buddhist ethics in the light of these conclusions. If the identity problem has the centrality which I have accorded it, its obduracy may be destructive.

I will now seek to show that such a drastic conclusion is unnecessary. Its avoidance formed part of my intention in Chapter Two, where I showed that there were strands

[509] Gowans sets out and appears to accept such an argument. See p.12 above.

within Buddhist ethics unexposed to the consequences of the identity problem. The first two components of my account were examples of such. In the Buddha's time, it was possible to revalue inherited and customary values, attitudes and practices, and it was natural to make of the Buddha an exemplar and object of worship. Together, these strands make up something significant. The works of religious anthropology to which I have referred above all show how far this has been the common practice of laypeople in traditional Buddhist countries, at least around the middle of the last century. [510] The contemporary Westerner – once seized of the problems I have been considering, and finding them obdurate – is however more likely to adopt a different form of practice. What this amounts to will vary with his starting-point. As a form of 'virtue ethics', the Buddhist ethical scheme has an appeal detachable from its metaphysical frame. I have shown that *karman* is at the heart of it; I have also shown that *karman* as K1 has few shocks for anyone coming to it from an Aristotelian starting-point. A Westerner whose moral practice has been of this kind, who then feels the attraction of something Buddhist – Buddha, Dharma or Sangha, perhaps - may come to see his moral presumptions in a new light. He may see little reason to modify his practice, except in detail or emphasis, such as avoidance of any killing of animals. For a Westerner in a different moral tradition, or in none that is fully articulated, a sharper adaptation may be necessary. I have in mind someone whose presumptions, conscious or not, are deontic or utilitarian. The adoption of Buddhist practice may be registered in his coming to see conduct and its consequences in terms of the opposition of *kuśala* and *akuśala*, rather than that of right and wrong or of the furtherance of utility. Although such a move may be bewildering, it is readily imaginable. As a first step towards the orientation just described, it may be taken without concern for those aspects of Buddhism which seem perplexing.

In the case of both East and West, these forms of practice – devotional and moral, however combined – may be supported by the regular practice of *bhāvanā*. To the contemporary West, this is probably the most intriguing element in the Buddhist system. It is common enough to find meditation taught, even by members of the Sangha, with no hint that it finds its proper place only in a larger context, at least in part dogmatic. From the standpoint of Buddhist tradition, this procedure may be dubious. Seen from outside, the association of Buddhist elements, moral orientation and meditation practice,

[510] GOMBRICH(1), SPIRO, TAMBIAH.

will be registered as ‘Buddhist’, and understandably so. My negative conclusion on the bearing of the identity problem may therefore seem to go beyond what is warranted. What I have just described is the practice of many – I would say, of the majority - of contemporary Western practitioners of Buddhism. Who is to say that it should not count as ‘Buddhism’?

There is a close Christian parallel to this form of Buddhist practice. At least since the middle of the 19th Century, there has been a kind of Christian profesion notable for its playing-down of dogma and corresponding emphasis on conduct and religious sentiment. Its proponents are likely to present it as a commitment to spirituality for its own sake, apart from all doctrinal statement. I have no space for an adequate account of this development. It may be enough if I say that it finds its classic expression, in English, in the work of Matthew Arnold.[511] In our own day it is well expounded, with a polemical edge, in the numerous works of Don Cupitt.[512] What Cupitt offers is a line of argument that recalls Arnold in point and substance, though hardly in manner. He is concerned to show how the notion of ‘God’ may still figure in the practice and moral orientation of the believer who has discarded dogma.

Here, I recall the definitions I offered in my opening chapter. I distinguished the terms ’Buddhist’ and ‘Buddhistic’, very much with the needs of the present case in mind. If I were concerned primarily with Cupitt and his kind, I would introduce the term ’Christianist’, not in disparagement (any more than ‘Neo-Aristotelian’) but for clarification. What I have described as being the effective beliefs and practice of many contemporary Buddhists is, I believe, parallel to the ‘Christianist’. They are, therefore, best called Buddhistic. The term has a wide extension, covering the positions of Easterners who have never taken doctrine on board and contemporary Westerners who, consciously or not, have given it a wide berth. What marks it out is the omission of parts of the traditional scheme – that which is caught in good textbooks, one might say – which the tradition would have held to be of the essence. On this understanding, the Buddhistic is at least less of a shortfall from the Buddhist than the Cupittian Christian or ‘Christianist’ equivalent is from the traditional Christian. It registers no such shock as the ‘revaluation’ of the notion of God. From the traditional Christian standpoint, as from

[511] In particular, in *Literature and Dogma.* See ARNOLD, especially Ch.1.
[512] Especially in *Taking Leave of God.* See CUPITT.

the Brahmanical, even traditional Buddhism has much of the ‘demythologised’ about it. I have brought this out in dealing with ‘revaluation’ above.

I disparage none of the Buddhistic positions to which practioners may have had recourse, and grant that a form of practice made up of the moral code and *bhāvanā* may well be life-transforming. Consider, however, the general account of the Buddhist scheme offered in Chapter Two. I set out the eight components of the *āryāṣṭaṅgamarga* and noted that the commentarial tradition took them to fall into three sets. The range of Buddhistic practices just described amounts, in all its forms, to only two of these. The third, made up of the first two components, amounting together to the cultivation of ‘wisdom’ or ‘insight’ (*prajña*), makes no part of it. Here is the falling-short from what it should be uncontroversial to call the full Buddhist practice. This point may be made another way. *Karman* – K2 as much as K1 - and rebirth – that is, its extension as K3 - were at the heart of the Buddha’s liberating insight on the occasion of his enlightenment, extending to knowledge of the previous lives, governed by *karman*, of all beings. With its peculiar prominence, nothing in the Buddha’s teaching counts for more. What I have called ‘Buddhistic’, in its various expressions, is notable for its effective disregard.

In this section, I have been treading a middle way. I have been urging that the persistence of the identity problem is not such as to destroy the possibility of a kind of religious and moral practice inspired by the Buddha. Should the problem be found insoluble, something will be left. Along with this, I have claimed that when, in consequence, components of the traditional Buddhist scheme are discarded, what is left will be significantly impaired We are at too early a stage of the present argument for me to grant that a ‘Buddhistic’ restatement of the kind I have been discussing is the best – let alone, the only - answer to the problem. What I exposed in Chapter Four were perplexities, rather than conclusions requiring the outright giving up of the notions of *karman* and rebirth. I return now to the question of what we should make of these notions in the light of everything that has gone before.

90. A new view of *karman*

I have already pointed out parallels to *karman* as K1 in the Western tradition. I will now go further and claim that *karman* may be seen, profitably, as the Indian formulation, in the language of Indian religion, of an understanding of the course of existence that may be universal. This is found widely in non-philosophical writings of all kinds in English. Anyone with *karman* in mind will find it in such declarations as this:

> Sow an act and you reap a habit. Sow a habit and you reap a character. Sow a character and you reap a destiny.[513]

These words of a largely forgotten Victorian novelist, Charles Reade, will be found persuasive to the extent that they ring true in practice. What he declares is brought out in the work of the great novelists, and in that of many not great. Any artist concerned with presenting human life over a period will adopt something like Reade's words as a principle of narration, as a stop against presenting action and consequence as arbitrary.

I am concerned, at this stage of the argument, with the single human life-span only, and to suggest that works of the imagination may tell a truth about life and display the connection between action and destiny. For this to be possible, the truth-teller may be either a writer of fiction or a historian. While this is the sphere in which the great novelists are conspicuous, the plainest expression in English of what I have in mind is probably a work of history, Carlyle's *The French Revolution*. This is a narrative of fact, of large imaginative scope, with a cumulative effect which is hard to convey by quotation. Carlyle's object is the exposure, across a large field not only of what was but of why it was, the 'why' having a dimension which, I claim, is properly called 'karmic'. Sometimes this strain within the explanation is made explicit: 'Throughout all time, if we read aright, sin was, is, will be, the parent of misery'. [514] The language of this 'reading' recalls Carlyle's Calvinist formation but the conviction is grounded in experience at its most general and diverse.

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[513] See Notes & Queries, 9th Series, Vol 12, p377
[514] CARLYLE, Book I, Ch 7

Carlyle shows the *ancien regime* as a living thing.[515] It attracts a doom that he shows to be the outcome of a process by no means only karmic. The karmic is only an element within it but, if it were absent, the explanation would lose much of its force, perhaps much of its cogency. The obvious comparison, with Marxist explanation, is enlightening. The difference is less than total, but still of prime importance. Carlyle and the Marxists both see the determining force of power relations founded on economic power, and Carlyle shows the ripeness for supersession of a regime left exposed by changes in these relations. Admirers of Carlyle may grant everything the Marxists may wish to press on the importance of material factors. What Carlyle insists on in addition to this is an interlocking moral order. This is neither more nor less than a part of reality, a matter of truth, and it is this that I have characterised as 'karmic'.[516] The point may be made more simply by saying that there are moral truths and that disregard of these truths will rebound on the agent, in the same way as disregard or ignorance of other facts of the matter. This is hardly something to be argued, at least not by the procedure taken up by Carlyle. The reader will be persuaded or not, to the degree to which he finds that procedure dramatically satisfying or moving. All I am concerned to establish is that karmic explanation is regularly intelligible and may be cogent.

Karman by way of the attribution of particular consequences to individuals – which I have called K2 - finds only limited support in what I have described above. This does not mean it should be abandoned, as something persuasive only to those with a Buddhist view of the Buddha. An example may bring out the way it has a moral significance of its own. John Cornford was killed in the Spanish Civil War, just after leaving Cambridge, in combat as a volunteer on the Republican side. A memorial volume was published in 1938. In his recollections of Cornford, the historian VG Kiernan records:

> I recall his telling, with genuine relish, a story of Bela Kun machine-gunning five thousand prisoners during a forced retreat in the Russian Civil war: he told it not

[515] ' … it is singular how long the rotten will hold together, provided you do not handle it roughly. For whole generations it continues standing, 'with a ghastly affectation of life', after all truth and life has fled out of it ..' Op cit, Book II, Ch 3

[516] 'For Nature is true and not a lie. No lie that you can speak or act but it will come, after longer or shorter circulation, like a Bill drawn on Nature's Reality, and be presented there for payment – with the answer, No effects.' Op cit Book III, Ch 1

> in a spirit of sadism, but of appreciation of an act of political necessity firmly carried out.

A few lines before this, Kiernan has said:

> Cornford had the same sense of absolute separation from the 'enemy', of irreconcilable antagonism and difference … For 'they' were not merely oppressive, they were empty; they forced everyone else to live wretchedly in order to maintain a manner of life which did not even make themselves happy. For him, also, the Revolution was as unquestionable a certainty as the Resurrection to a Christian. [517]

This passage throws light on both the K1 and the K2 versions of *karman*, and may suggest how they might be vindicated. Cornford's belief in the inevitability of revolution is a matter of course, but he seems equally firm in his belief in the unhappiness of the bourgeoisie, this deriving – as if by law – from their exploitation of 'every one else'. Cornford must have taken happiness to be more than enjoyment or pleasure; his use of the term carries a strong evaluative charge, and its realisation is incompatible with wrong-doing.   On an Aristotelian understanding of action and well-being, this makes excellent sense, but it may be surprising to find a view of the matter plainly 'karmic', in the broad sense, in a Marxist of Cornford's intransigence. May not such an understanding be inescapable, forced even on the reluctant by experience?

This makes the first passage quoted problematic, as well as – perhaps - shocking. What, one wonders, did Cornford take 'political necessity' to be. It has presumably a law-like quality, conformity to its requirements ensuring a desirable outcome. This view of it seems simply to be given. Cornford's consistency has to come into question. His case seems to bring out the difficulty of maintaining a consistent view of the notion of law in understanding experience and historical consequence. Though he would have insisted on this notion, his case seems to show the difficulty of doing without a sense of

[517] SLOAN, pp.121/22

a moral dimension to law: he admits this dimension in considering the case of the bourgeoisie, if not explicitly, and over-rides it in considering the disposal of prisoners, with his plea of 'necessity'.

I am suggesting that something like a karmic understanding of experience is ubiquitous, so much so that it is to be found in the most surprising places and among those whose conscious attitudes are highly resistant to it. So much may be taken as a vindication of K1. In the course through history, and the fate, of the Marxist cause, we may also find something of K2, for all the devotion and self-sacrifice sometimes found in its proponents. Anyone inclined to credit K2 ('Don't do that or you'll pay for it') will be likely to attribute the wreckage of much disinterested hope to the brisk and law-determined callousness approved – at least once, it seems - by Cornford. On the assumptions of K2, anyone thinking of emulating Bela Kun should recall the likelihood – or inevitability – of the action rebounding on its perpetrator. If this seems fanciful, the advocate of K2 may go on to suggest that achieving a desirable end by such means cannot but corrupt the end. Even more than in the case of K1, this is something that has to be pointed to rather than argued. One can do no more than advert to history, or to imaginative literature, or to such day-to-day experience as tends to enforce the claim. [518]

Some remarks in the recently published memoirs of a historian and communist (a Party-member to the end) suggest that this point may not be easy to take. Hobsbawm writes:

> *The USSR and most of the states and societies built on its model, children of the October Revolution of 1917 which inspired us, have collapsed so completely, leaving behind a landscape of material and moral ruin, that <u>it must now be obvious that failure was built into this enterprise from the start</u> (my emphasis)*

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[518] Yeats' poems dealing with the Easter Rising, and with the struggle and civil war that followed 1918, are an example of the history and of the imaginative literature that I have in mind.

Here is a statement of karman, unrecognised as such by Hobsbawm, and all the more striking on account of his apparent lack of interest in all matters of religion. He goes on:

> *What power does, especially in times of crisis and war, is to make us do and seek to justify things unacceptable when done by private persons.* [519]

Someone who accepts the reality of *karman* might say in response to this that while the distinction of public and private is a vital one it is not that distinction that is most to the point here. The truth which seems to escape Hobsbawm is the one caught by karmic-theory, that ill-judged, or *akuśala*, action corrupts the whole subsequent process. The notion of *karman* is therefore the best of guides to action.

91. *Karman* as a guiding metaphor

I am suggesting that karman, extending to K2, may serve as what I will call 'a guiding metaphor'. Its use is by way of a postulate – that of the 'fruiting' of action – which is not to be taken literally, but the imagination of which serves as a moral guideline. Here is a notion which anyone might take to himself for application in practice. Cornford, contemplating the action of Bela Kun, might have recalled that *karman* is a matter of speech as much as of action. [520] He might then have been careful to give no verbal endorsement to an act of mass murder, for fear of the consequences – a fear which might have had two aspects. The first, corresponding to K1, would have concerned the consequences for himself in point of character; the second, to K2, would have concerned the outcome in practice, for himself and others. If his imagination had extended to what is expounded by Carlyle, this fear - or line of reflection – might have been a powerful restraint. [521]

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[519] HOBSBAWM , pp.127 & 129

[520] In setting out the *Dasakusalakammapatha* in Chapter Two, I showed how it presented a progression: bodily, verbal and mental abstentions. *Karman* bears on all three.

[521] Here I pick up the point made on p.123 above that *karman* is a vital notion and that discussion will be impoverished without it.

All this should recall something advocated, in a well-known paper, by Braithwaite.[522] Braithwaite writes as a strict empiricist and verificationist, concerned at the same time to commit himself to religious practice of a Christian character. His concern is with how he might make this commitment without qualifying his philosophical stance. His first move is to extend his verificationist requirement from ‘meaning’, in a narrow sense, to ‘use’. Finding that ‘moral statements have a use in guiding conduct’, he takes this to be a significant sense in which they have meaning. He then declares that a religious statement ‘is used by a man who asserts it in order to express his religious conviction’. He supposes that the point of a moral assertion is to express the intention to act in a certain way – that is, in line with a general policy or principle or set of principles. A religious assertion is a moral assertion of a particular kind. What characterises it is the nature of the general policy, religious in character, behind the assertion. He asserts: ‘Unless religious principles are moral principles, it makes no sense to speak of putting them into practice’.

The assertion, ‘God is love’, may be taken as an instance of what Braithwaite has in mind, meaningless – it may be argued – on verificationist principles, but finding a meaning here as an expression of the intention to live in a way which Braithwaite calls ‘agapeistic’. What is required for this intention to be fulfilled is a conversion both of the will – in the resolution to act – and also of the heart. The resolution to live in an agapeistic way requires both. It is a resolution which will be backed up by reference to religious stories, which need not be taken as history – as the orthodox would take them – to be properly motivating. What counts as a ‘story’ is perhaps less than clear. Are all, or very many, religious assertions to be so regarded, or only those parts of religious narrative which are indubitably story-like? What Braithwaite has in mind certainly extends to the gospel accounts of the charitable works ascribed to Jesus. In telling of the Good Samaritan – not one of Braithwaite’s examples – Jesus employs a story of the kind likely to prompt such works. The gospel-writer reporting Jesus’ telling is doing the same at one remove. What he records is therefore apt for the use on which Braithwaite founds his religious profession. He is clear that it is not only stories in the Christian tradition which are open to adoption for this use:

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522 BRAITHWAITE. This paper received a strong endorsement from Hare. See HARE (2).

> On the assumption that the ways of life advocated by Christianity and by Buddhism are essentially the same, it will be the fact that the intention to follow this way of life …. is associated in the mind of a Buddhist with thinking of another set of stories (the Buddhist stories) [which distinguishes the two]. [523]

92. What a guiding metaphor is, and what it is not

What I call 'a guiding metaphor' is hardly obscure as a notion, and its adoption in practice – fully conscious or not – is readily observable. This is especially so in the development of religion, though it need not be confined to religion. Much of the 'revaluation' of Brahmanical notions of which I gave some account in Chapter Two might have been described in such terms. An example outside religion is to be found in talk of the 'fairness' and 'unfairness' of what may be thrown up by the chances of human existence. It is hardly contestable that judgments of fairness and unfairness are applicable only to only social structures and arrangements – in the broadest sense –and to human actions or inactions. Such features of the natural order as the distribution of talents and happy or unhappy genetic endowments cannot be held to be fair or unfair, nor can accident or luck. At the same time, while quite aware of this, we find ourselves speaking of strikingly favourable or unfavourable outcomes within this sphere in just those terms. For example, a family already much afflicted by misfortune, such as disabilities of genetic origin among its members, loses a child in a traffic accident. To regard such a catastrophe as 'unfair' is, at once, to be muddled – on a strict and literal view - and perfectly natural. We are seized by a thought of the unfairness of life. What I am suggesting is that this second, metaphorical, understanding may be useful in practice, by virtue of serving as a guiding principle. This is because the sense of outrage likely to go with an apprehension of 'unfairness' will be a stronger spur to remedial action than pity by itself. To work for justice within the world as if the world could be just, when we know that in another sense it cannot be, is to adopt and be governed by a guiding metaphor.

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[523] See MITCHELL p.84

In proposing that *karman* should be understood in this way, I am not claiming that all problems with the notion will thereby be rendered soluble. At least one obvious problem remains, that of what to do in painful circumstances where the good of others, or the discharge of a plain duty to others, seems to require what is certainly the wrong choice of action in karmic terms. [524] In raising this problem above, I gave the example of the man who goes fishing, because only by doing so can he feed his children. Coming to see the *karman*-notion in metaphorical terms will not do away with that problem. What I am claiming is that the *karman*-notion itself is quite as intelligible, and otherwise more acceptable, on a metaphorical understanding. I am not claiming that acting on it will, as a matter of course, become any easier.

It may bring the notion of a guiding metaphor into sharper relief if I treat briefly of what it is not. It is, in the first place, no equivalent to what is found referred to as 'Pascal's wager'. This term relates to what Pascal recommends to someone unsure whether there is a god or not. That question will seem too important to be ignored, and the choice of what to believe to be inescapable. Pascal urges that it is reasonable to choose to believe: if one does, and after death there turns out to be a god, the benefit of such a choice can be assumed to be vast; if there is no god, and death is the end, there can be no corresponding bad consequences. Pascal takes this to be persuasive, not only when the arguments, for and against belief in a god, seem finely balanced, but also when the existence of a god seems improbable. [525]

There is a superficial resemblance between what Pascal advocates and what I have described as the adoption and employment of a guiding metaphor. In each case, the recommendation is by way of response to acknowledged uncertainty, when choice or action – commitment, in a word – is inescapable. The sharp difference is that in accepting a guiding metaphor one is aware of so doing: there will and should be no self-persuasion that what is understood to be a metaphor is anything else. Pascal seems to think one can come to 'believe' by a process of self-bemusement. He describes such a

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[524] Section 43 above. The difficulty is caught by a once well-known line of verse: 'The conscious acceptance of guilt in the fact of murder'. This comes from W H Auden's poem, *Spain 1937*, published in the volume *Another Time*, in 1940. Auden's extensive revisions of this poem suggest his discomfort.

[525] PASCAL pp.174/78

process, which he says 'will make [you] more docile (*abêtira*)'. [526] What I mean by following a guiding metaphor is no sort of stultification, as this seems to be.

Another contrasting approach, much in vogue in one form or other, is the one grounded in remarks attributed to Wittgenstein. [527] These are not easy to summarise, but main themes can be picked out. One such is Wittgenstein's insistence that religious beliefs are not held on evidence and do not become more or less probable in the light of fresh evidence. Two people might discuss whether or not there is a German aircraft overhead, and one of them might sensibly remark that he can't be sure: 'Possibly, or possibly not'. Wittgenstein rules out any such response if the question is one of religious belief, the instance he has in mind being the Last Judgment. In such a case, there is no question of probability.

> Why shouldn't one form of life culminate in an utterance of belief in a Last Judgment? But I couldn't say either 'Yes' or 'No' to the statement that there wll be such a thing. Nor 'Perhaps' or 'I'm not sure'.

The reference to 'form of life' takes us some way further to understanding Wittgenstein, as does the following:

> Suppose we said that a certain picture might play the role of constantly admonishing me, or I always think of it. Here, an enormous difference would be between people for whom the picture is constantly in the foreground, and the others who just didn't use it at all.

'Admonishing' evokes the guiding metaphor notion. There is, it seems, a real parallel between Wittgenstein's view of characteristic religious vocabulary and the view,

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[526] Krailsheimer's translation. Mackie translates 'make you stupid'. MACKIE (3) p.202. Pascal is perhaps more concerned with commitment of some sort rather than with belief, though the word he uses is 'believe' (*croire*).
[527] WITTGENSTEIN, pp.53-72. The remarks are not *verbatim.*

associated with Braithwaite, which I have been setting out. One may grant as much, while being concerned to exclude a common development of Wittgensteinian character. I take the work of DZ Phillips as an example of this development, both because of its considerable influence and because Phillips deals explicitly, and critically, with Braithwaite. [528]

One of Phillips' main concerns is to deal critically with Hume's treatment of theistic religion – that is, with its treatment as a natural phenomenon, explicable as such, and so to be explained away. He grants that 'given its assumptions, Hume's attack on certain theistic arguments is entirely successful'. He proceeds – in sum – by seeking to dispose of these assumptions, doing so from a Wittgensteinian standpoint, characterising Hume's followers as 'reductionist' – that is, as holding that religious beliefs can be restated in the language of the realities which produced them, and so disposed of. Quite late in the argument, he refers to Braithwaite, whom he sees as a reductionist, consciously so or not. [529] : It is not unfair, I think, to say simply that he finds Braithwaite too little of a follower of Wittgenstein:

> Because [Braithwaite] shares the same conception of truth and falsity as the philosophers he disagrees with, he cannot call the religious stories true or false. He simply speaks of them as psychologically efficacious in supporting moral conduct. Braithwaite does not realise that in these religious beliefs, the grammar of 'belief' and 'truth' is not the same as in the case of empirical propositions or the prediction of future events.

This puts the difference between Braithwaite and Wittgenstein's followers clearly enough. I take it to be persuasive enough to show that in talking of a 'guiding metaphor' we are not – for all that is to be found in Wittgenstein – taking up a Wittgensteinian position. My own use of the expression is, I hope, all the more clear.

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[528] See PHILLIPS, especially Chapter 9.
[529] Op cit p.140

The approach which I am commending may readily be taken out of its Christian context of origin, in which it is exposed to peculiar stresses. Its greater acceptability within a Buddhist context has already been recognised. The argument of Cupitt's best-known book, *Taking Leave of God*, is sufficiently like an advocacy of Buddhism for Cupitt to define the position of 'Christian Buddhism' and to ask what is wrong with it. [530] He answers 'not much', before proceeding to find it 'incomplete'. He goes on to explain why he stays where he is. Broadly friendly critics, such as John Hick, have questioned the coherence of this stance. Quoting Cupitt's own description of his position as 'objectively atheous', Hick asks whether 'God can indeed be demythologised, and regarded as an imaginative personification of spirituality, without religious loss'. He goes on 'There would be no loss for a Buddhist'. [531]This is plainly right, and it permits the general conclusion that the line of thought I have been recommending is one much more easily accepted by the Buddhist advocate or practitioner than by the Christian equivalent of either.

93. Equality of indifference – or of concern? Another view of rebirth

A revised understanding of *karman* requires a compatible revision of that of rebirth. The two notions have always been found to be interdependent and this interdependence brings up a difficulty. In its expression as K3, *karman* was held to extend beyond the limit of one existence. It was taken to follow from its traditional derivation from the sacrificial process that any part of it 'unspent' in one life would be spent in a later life or lives. On the revised understanding of *karman* just offered, there can be no such consequence. This would be a problem for the tradition even if it were not the case, as I take it to be, that the traditional view is doubtfully intelligible.

I have already shown how the conclusions of Part Two of *Reasons and Persons* are of more support to the Buddhist view than Parfit appreciates. It will be recalled that he takes the *karman*-doctrine to be a Buddhist expression of the self-interested concern which he finds ubiquitous in discussion of reasons for action, and a support for the Self-interest theory, or 'S'. In Chapter Five, I suggested that Parfit's own discussion provided

[530] CUPITT, p.82.
[531] GOULDER & HICK p.106

all the materials for a correction of this misunderstanding, especially in its extension to the notion of *karman*. Parfit's rebuttal of S seems to bring in its train the dislodgment also of Sidgwick's 'philosophical' Egoism and what I called the 'vulgar' egoism of everyday life. Here we have support for something much more positive than equality of indifference. Parfit leaves us with a philosophically grounded presentation of the case for disinterested concern. The deployment of this case will also pick up the concern for future generations, the main subject of Part Four, which I have had too little space to discuss in detail. This strand in Parfit's work fits very well with the altruistic, warm-hearted, strain in Buddhist teaching and legend which I have sought to bring out. This finds a classic statement in the Pali *Mettāsutta* (quoted in full above). I have also pointed to a parallel in the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* to Parfit's argument for disinterestedness, and can add that this whole work, distinct in *genre* from the *Mettāsutta,* is in this respect at one with it. It is in this strain that I find the basis for the understanding of rebirth to which I proceed.

I begin with some account of the practice of *mettābhāvana* (the cultivation or causing-to-be of friendliness). *Mettā* is one of a set of four qualities, the development of which is at the heart of practice. The others are *karunā* (compassion), *muditā* (happiness in the happiness of others), and *uppekha* (equanimity). *Uppekha* is not only the completion of the practice, but is taken to contain within itself the other three. [532]

A version of *mettābhāvanā* taught within the Theravada school, in which the *Mettāsutta* is found, has the meditator begin his practice by developing *mettā* towards himself. Various ways are suggested for doing this: one may be the reflection that dislike is painful and damaging, self-dislike as much as any other; another may be the discovery of friendly feeling that was always present, if obscured. Once *mettā* has been developed to some degree, the focus of the practice moves to someone regarded sympathetically, then to someone regarded neutrally, and finally to someone regarded – at least to some degree – with animosity or to someone found difficult to deal with. The

[532] The four-fold practice is known as the cultivation of the *Brahmavihārā* ˙ (Divine Abidings). In cosmological terms, these are four gradations of a heavenly state in which one might hope to be reborn. The Buddhist tradition in large part substitutes meditative realisation – that is, the realisation of heaven in the present life, if only partially and temporarily – for cosmological aspiration. Here is a good example of what is discussed in Chapter 2, the adaptation by the Buddha of existing religious notions for his own purposes.

prime intention is to come to feel the same sentiment, that of friendliness, and that to the same degree, to four successive objects - in other words, to remove, by means of the practice, a normally inescapable difference of regard. This intention may be expressed by the visualisation together of the four objects of meditation at the close of the practice. A deeper intention is the weakening, and finally removal, of the sense of difference. It should weaken the habitual presumption of the priority of oneself. To the extent that the practice is fruitful, its outcome should be a lessening of self-concern and the substitution of a general benevolence, no mere sentiment but an orientation of the will. What it has in common with the Parfit of Part Two is a ruling-out of speciality of concern. For Parfit, there are no grounds in reason for such speciality. The practice of *mettābhāvanā* is complementary to that, as it is directed towards the correction of bias towards oneself or particular others at the affective level of being.

The examples within the text of the objects of the loving attention towards which the practice is directed - the tall, the small, the medium-sized, and so on – make a way of saying ‘everything’, and the aspiration with which the text concludes does the same: ‘ … born (or existent) or to-be-born, may all beings be happy-minded.’ [533] The Pali word, *bhavesi* (wishing-to-be-born), may mean ‘those in the womb’ – as it is often rendered - in the first place, but it may stand for ‘to-be-born’ or ‘all future beings’. Concern for future beings is one of the aspirations of the practice. The practitioner has good grounds for reflecting that there is ‘going-on’, and that he has every reason to be concerned for it, as his practice is one of the extension to all beings of an originally self-interested concern. He will avoid action that is *akuśala*, with a view indeed to his own well-being in the present existence, and with a view to the general well-being, into which an earlier concern has merged, in all future existences. In so acting he will be taking *karman* as a guiding metaphor. In this respect, and in the ‘agapeistic’ formation of the whole exercise, his action will be hardly distinguishable from that commended by Braithwaite.

The view of the matter which I am recommending here was anticipated above. In Chapter Five, in the context of Parfit’s Extreme and Moderate Claims, I pointed out the basis of a Minimal Claim. [534] To paraphrase what I said then: if I can care disinterestedly for the future of others, so – in a sense, disinterestedly and to the same

[533] *Bhūta vā sambhavesi vā, sabbe sattā bhavantu sukhitattā.*
[534] See section 63 above, especially p.172. For Parfit’s ‘Claims’, see PARFIT(3), section 102.

degree – I can care for my own future. This suggestion could not be taken further in the context in which it was put, which was one of whether Reductionism permitted special concern for one's future being. Parfit left this question open, being unable to choose between the two Claims he had brought up. If the case I have just made is persuasive, that otherwise intractable problem finds a solution. Special concern should be given up, but concern for an all-embracing well-being should be developed.

I must make it clear that I take the revised understanding which I am recommending to be grounded in the Budhist tradition itself. It is there that I find the emphasis just described. The support I have found in Parfit's Part Two is incidental, however welcome. For all that, an account of this grounding of morality as it is found in other traditions would be well worth offering. It could only be done at some length. Among writers of the present day, I would have referred to Nagel, for the comparison with the *The View fron Nowhere*, and more especially with the earlier *The Possibility of Altruism*. [535] The most conspicuous figure on the philosophical hinterland is, however, Schopenhauer. Two emphases within his extensive output are much to the point. One is the claim that all living things are phenomenal manifestations of the Will and so, in a sense, one and the same, this consideration being one which should count against egoistic concern. The other is the stress on compassion for others, presented as the defining factor of moral action. Both emphases are at the heart of his thinking. [536]

After dismissing an apparent solution to the identity problem by way of recourse to Parfit, we conclude with one of a certain Parfitian character. Parfit offers us what is 'as good as' the perpetuation of our identity, after concluding that 'we are not as we suppose'. What I am urging is that this line of thought should be taken further. The survival, for a time, of chains of psychological continuity and connection, however brought about, would not, I have argued, be as good as - or as bad as - survival. It is too little of a substitute for identity for it to serve as a motivating factor for proper action. But a general concern for all that goes on may provide such motivation, and such concern may be developed. For one's own immediate good, it should be developed. Together with the restated notion of *karman* that has been offered above, it gives good grounds for disinterested motivation. If I am right in this, what follows is of prime

[535] NAGEL (1) & (2)

[536] SCHOPENHAUER (1) & (2). Peculiarly to the point are Chapters 16 and 18 of the earlier work, and Chapter 51 of the later.

importance: the identity problem, at least in its 'outer' dimension, is in large part solved. The solution is by way, not of equality of indifference, but of equality of concern. It is a solution which allows us to drop the caveat I interposed when putting forward Paul Williams' comments on Santideva in the context of Parfit's discussion in Part Two. The caveat was to the effect that insistency on consistency might be two-edged, and that it might lead to the giving up of all concern rather than to its extension. This implication is avoidable only when, along with the plea for consistency, there is a stress on the all-embracing benevolence which is in one's own interest, as the practice of the virtues is regularly in one's own interest, as well as for the general benefit.

94. Is the restated position authentic?

A readily imaginable response to these restatements would be to call into question the authenticity of the position which they are brought forward to support. It may be asked whether this is 'Buddhism'. I have referred above to worthwhile ways of following the Buddha which are best described as 'Buddhistic'. Only a form of practice grounded on the whole *marga* seemed to count as Buddhist – that is, to be 'authentic'.

I take my restatement of *karman* and rebirth to permit the claim that my restated position as a whole is authentic. By this, I mean that it has this grounding in the *marga* and that, in consequence, nothing vital to the Buddhist scheme has been left out. The Buddhist traditionalist certainly, and some modern commentators very probably, will be reluctant to concede this. Their riposte may be that the Buddha was enlightened, that enlightenment cannot err, while it is implicit in my restatements that much that he said – understood literally – is unsustainable. In any vigorous polemic, the point could be made with more force. To put it plainly, no Buddhist practitioner could be content to regard the Buddha as teaching what is not the case, and doing so on points of prime importance. Is the restatement that I have suggested one that inevitably puts the Buddha in the wrong in vital respects? If this is the case, then the restated view is surely 'inauthentic'. The best that it could be called is 'Buddhistic'.

Here, I can only suggest how the restated view which I have offered as a solution might be found compatible with the traditional claims made for the Buddha. First, we

may regard the Buddha's pronouncements on *karman* and rebirth as being an example of action of the kind with which the Buddhist tradition is quite familiar – that is, of *upāya-kausalya* (skill-in-means). Only the briefest account of this celebrated notion, characteristically one of the Mahayana, but found in germ earlier, is possible here. The notion is one of skilful exposition and action. In a sense, all Buddhist teaching and practice on the part of an agent of high attainment is a case of skill-in-means. It is often found applied more narrowly, to refer to words and actions commonly unfamiliar, startling or rule-breaking. The connection with the antinomian strain in the Mahayana will be evident. The agent – taken to be well advanced on the path, perhaps a Bodhisattva – may say or do what would normally be wrong, even bizarre, in his purpose of acting for the benefit of beings. [537] The exception finds its justification both in intention and outcome. As a contemporary scholar puts it, '… the Mahayana stresses that it is a teaching differentiated according to needs and fashioned entirely in the light of the problem and its resolution'. [538] The Buddha's conduct is naturally taken to be the perfect case of the exercise of skill-in-means: might it not be that his declarations in the early texts are properly recorded instances of such an exercise, intended to direct the actions of particular auditors for their good?

The other line of defence is to admit, at this late stage, the possibility which my distinction between 'the ethics of the Buddha' and 'Buddhist ethics' was intended to exclude. I drew this distinction in Chapter One, and should repeat now that what I have called 'Buddhist ethics' is the ethics of the texts. My whole argument has been conducted on the understanding that that was all we have as evidence. None the less, it is plainly <u>conceivable</u> that the teaching of the Buddha on *karman* and rebirth was too subtle and too highly nuanced to be open to being transmitted without over-simplification and without the introduction of some crudity. If there was a partial distortion of the record, it would have coincided in time with the wide and rapid dissemination of the teaching and its adoption by a penumbra of followers for whom only hell might have been thought to serve as an effective and motivating deterrent. It seems, therefore, possible – though beyond proof either way – that the difficulties in the orthodox doctrine with which we have been concerned should be attributed to the removal or blurring, in the course of transcription, of necessary qualifications and to the

[537] In this context, 'Bodhisattva' means 'virtual Buddha'.
[538] PYE (1) p.133

effects of the popularisation brought about by missionary success. This seems at least arguable, though success in maintaining it might come only at the price of removing a vital restraint: how much else might not be brought forward as arguable in just the same way?

Of these two possible lines of response, the first is to the effect that we should read the texts with an eye to a subtlety we have probably missed; the second that we should do so with a view to removing imperfections that have crept in. The two seem not to be incompatible. Either one might prove effective polemically, and might tend to the comfort of the practitioner.

95. The coercive force of Buddhist ethics

How far is the motivation to live skilfully is preserved through these restatements? The verses from the Pali *Dhammapada* to which I have referred more than once presented the consequences of adultery as immediately bad and as issuing in bad *karman* and a bad rebirth. When I first quoted them, I granted that for some prospective adulterers only the future consequences would be decisive. What greater deterrent could there be than the threat of hell or the prospect of a pain-ridden and degraded rebirth in the human realm, or the two in succession? [539] Would the target of the warning not take the fresh understanding of *karman* and rebirth put forward here as draining that threat of all force, as he would not be the one to suffer?

This challenge can be answered, in part, on its own terms. The fresh understanding has been prompted by problems with the traditional view in respect of human rebirth. Difficulties over personal identity seem not to bear to anything like the same degree, if at all, on the other possibilities asserted. Most notably, as already hinted above, rebirth in hell seems broadly comprehensible on the traditional view and an exceptionally nasty prospect. Here is part of the answer. Its force is weakened by the consideration that existence in hell is not for ever, and the question of continuity through animal or human rebirth is postponed rather than avoided.

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[539] Both these possibilities are covered by the Pali word *gatī* (destiny/destination), in the passage quoted from the Dhammapāda. See p.9 above.

Setting this qualification aside, it has to be granted that the traditional view brought in sanctions, made up of suffering and bearing on individuals who merited it, for which there is no place on the view which I am now proposing. The challenge I have anticipated here can therefore be met only in part. The appeal of the fresh understanding will be to those practitioners who are at least a little way along the Path.

The Buddhist-advocate can, however, say that the contentment of the contented adulterer is hardly worth having. The slightest progress along the Path brings satisfaction of a more durable kind. This suggestion may be hard to put to those resistant to it, though it is not only the Buddhist scheme that has to rely on such an answer. Aristotle declares that one needs to have been brought up in good habits to be a student of moral philosophy, on one occasion quoting Plato in support. [540] The Buddhist-advocate will regard the beginnings of progress on the Path as the equivalent of such an upbringing. Most of those who heard the first teachings of the Buddha were, in all likelihood, at least as far advanced. It is clear from the record that those teachings were addressed to his contemporary mendicants, with whom, for all their differences, he enjoyed a large convergence of view and practice. Later on, it was addressed largely to his disciples, fellow-monks. In the case of each group, it may be supposed that motivation was of a kind that I have associated with *mettābhāvanā*, rather than in the threat of hell directed to that wider circle of the Buddha's followers furthest from the centre. [541]

The point may be developed further if we associate the adulterer with the 'sensible knave' of Hume's *Enquiry*.[542] Hume says of the knave,

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[540] ARISTOTLE (3), 1104. ' .. we ought to have been brought up in a particular way from our very youth, as Plato says, so as both to delight in and to be pained by the things we ought ..'. Also 1095.

[541] A parallel with Christianity might be developed at length. Nothing is more plainly presented in the Gospels than the possibility of everlasting punishment, and no threat could be a more powerful restraint on action. None the less, it is a Christian commonplace that a motivation to action founded in the love of God, or by way of response to Christ's sacrifice, is one to which a developed faith will naturally move, and that this move is for the better.

[542] HUME (2), IX, II, 232

> [he] may think that an act of iniquity or infidelity will make a considerable addition to his fortune, without causing any considerable breach in the social union and confederacy. That 'honesty is the best policy', may be a good general rule, but is liable to many exceptions ….

Hume finds something of the difficulty in dealing with this calculating wrongdoing – as he has no doubt it is – that we have just found in the prospective adulterer's case. His response, in the closing paragraphs on the *Enquiry*, comes close at moments to bluster. He relies quite largely on the suggestion that those who are clever in the sense in which the sensible knave is clever are often 'too clever by half'. This goes with the concession that the knave is not easily answered on his own terms.

> …. if a man think that this reasoning much requires an answer, it will be a little difficult to find any which will appear to him satisfactory and convincing. If his heart rebel not against such pernicious maxims, if he feel no reluctance to the thoughts of villainy or baseness ….

Hume's difficulty is that he has too little of an answer to the objector who declines to think morally. His procedure throughout, in considering morality, leans so much on benevolent sentiment that he seems to be left gasping by its absence. The Buddhist advocate is at least in a better case than Hume, in that his concern is to defend a form of virtue ethics. As I presented the virtue ethical tradition above, it is one which is founded on the intimate association of 'right' or 'skilful' action and well-being. In the Buddhist form of the tradition, this association is caught by the doctrine of *karman*, and the restated expression of *karman* can – I claim - be offered as a support for the point being pressed. Against a plain refusal to think morally, all that can be said from the Buddhist standpoint is that the unsatisfactoriness of life in *saṃsāra* can only be diminished by the adoption, over-riding such refusal, of the Buddha's counsel. In so saying, the appeal is to the other party's experience, not to anything that can be enforced from outside it by the arguments of others.

96. The ‘weak’ and ‘strong’ notions: the problem of conduct

I now return to the ‘inner’dimension of the problem, made up of the assertion of ‘weak’ and ‘strong’ notions of the subject. In opening, I remarked on the problematic status of each of these notions and on their apparent incompatibility. In the present chapter, I have been concerned, in the first place, with the ‘strong’ notion, and have sought to meet to meet the obvious objection, that it makes the extension across lives of personal continuity by way of *karman* and rebirth incredible. If my restatement of these notions has been persuasive, we may conclude – in respect of the ‘strong’ notion - as follows. The notion is non-reductionist. As a living thing, the subject is persistent throughout its present existence. He or she may find concern for the future, and for others, in the adoption of *karman* as a guiding metaphor and in the cultivation of equality of concern. The grounding of such concern may be found inadequate by those who decline to think morally and whose concern for the future is confined absolutely to consequences for themselves. With this qualification, to which I have suggested a line of response, we have – I now suggest, in concluding – an answer to the identity problem, which does indeed leave open the question of the reconciliation of the ‘strong’ notion with the ‘weak’.

This leaves the ‘weak’ notion, which appears to be open to the objections to all reductionist accounts of the subject. The most damning of these is that which I have referred to as ‘Butler’s objection’. In discussing Parfit, who is well seized of the force of this objection, I considered how far it might be met. While I found that the objections to Parfit’s response were decisive, to give up the ‘weak’ notion, in consequence, would be too destructive of the Buddhist scheme of things to be imaginable. Its abandonment would drain the assertion of the three *lakṣaṇāḥ/lakkhaṇāḥ* of all its force and point. How does it stand, therefore, in respect of their conduct, with those who continue to hold to the ‘weak’ notion?

They may follow Parfit in his presentation of the ‘normal cause’ of psychological connectedness and continuity and confine their application of the ‘weak’ notion to the person of one life-span. They may be untroubled by the difficulties over extended

persistence which I have sought to resolve, or they may choose to adopt the solution to those difficulties which I have just set out. Parfitian adherents to a reductionist view may choose to take *karman* as a guiding metaphor and to act on the principle of equality of concern. The appeal of such a moral strategy will be enhanced if they take seriously the claims of future generations which Parfit considers in Part Four.

Most Buddhists will however hold to the prospect of persistence across lives. This is so much at the centre of what we find in the Buddhist record that its abandonment might be felt as an embarrassment. If these Buddhists understand the prospect in the terms suggested by Buddhaghosa – the succession of what is 'neither the same nor different – they can, I suggest, join the Parfitians in accepting the broad lines of the solution I have offered. Parfit offers support for this option in his account of causes of continuity going beyond the 'normal' cause. In so doing, these Buddhists may continue to act on the traditional understanding of *karman* which I have criticised, or they may replace this understanding with one of *karman* as a guiding metaphor.

Those who take both the 'weak' view and the view of persistence expressed widely in the early texts – those, that is, who do not rely on Buddhaghosa's re-expression of it – face a difficulty which is more obvious. Throughout this work, I have laboured to bring out above the problem of conceiving oneself, at once, as an assembly of the flux of six *skandhāḥ*, and as an entity with the prospect of rebirth as a discrete individual, conceived as being so fully one's persistent self as to make that rebirth a point of concern. There is, I have found, no answer to this problem. Here, we have something directly comparable to our difficulty with the prospective adulterer. In each case, the question is one of how motivation is to be secured once its regular underpinning has become insecure.

In the case of the prospective adulterer and – more widely – of others who hold to the 'strong' notion, we concede to the intending agent that he will not go on – but stress, in ways I have just suggested, that that is by no means all he should consider. Adherents to the 'weak' notion will know that already. In that instance too we need not assume that a common concern will be to act badly with impunity. Someone conscious of the dilemma as a dilemma is likely to be far enough along the Path to find the practice of the virtues,

on their Buddhist conception, to be life-enhancing and, in karmic terms, traditional or restated, profitable in itself.

The problem, then, shrinks to one of the compatibility of the ‘weak’ and ‘strong’ notions. Here, I can only say that, though this may persist as a metaphysical problem, one of the subject, it is not such as to bear on the Buddhist ethical scheme in a way likely to make it ineffective. With the restatements I have offered, the problems of conduct, with some qualifications, are soluble. Given the scope of the present work, if there is no persistent problem for morality in the co-existence of the ‘weak’ and ‘strong’ notions, it should be permissible to give no further attention to the question of their compatibility.

97. The ‘weak’ and ‘strong’ notions: the problem of credibility

One problem with the ‘weak’ notion has been that of its credibility. In Buddhist terms, this takes the form of saying that the account of the subject in terms of the *skandhāḥ* may, after a fashion, be credited but not truly accepted. I have referred above to works with an anthropological approach, which suggest that such a failure of acceptance – that is, of real conviction – is often lacking among traditional Buddhists. Parfit considers this possibility in the context of his own argument and admits to the difficulty of holding the view of himself of which he is intellectually persuaded:

> What I find is this. I can believe this [Reductionist] view at the intellectual or reflective level. I am convinced by the arguments in favour of this view. But I think it likely that, at some other level, I shall always have doubts. [543]

[543] PARFIT (3) p.279

What Parfit registers has been appreciated ever since Locke's marking out of personal identity – and no doubt before, without being recorded. In a survey of the reaction to Locke's treatment of identity over the course of the Eighteenth Century, Martin and Barresi bring out the discomfort, and worse, of the prospect of taking something as insubstantial as the Lockean person – as it seemed to be - as a substitute for the soul. If this did not follow inevitably from subscription to Locke's conclusions, it appears to have been a common reaction. Martin and Barresi write:

> … the debate over how to understand ourselves, over what it is essentially that each of us is, provoked not only intellectual controversy but existential terror. …. To many important thinkers of the time it seemed that what could not possibly be a question – whether we even exist as selves that persist from moment to moment, let alone into an afterlife – had suddenly become one. What [these thinkers] saw – that the self may be merely imaginary – caused them to draw back in horror.[544]

What Parfit records, contemplating his own conclusions, is only a mercifully mild version of this reaction. It is no surprise that an adoption of Reductionism should have had that effect. The contemplation of the *skandha*-account of the subject may have the same effect.

The problem is one both of belief and of believing. Those inclined, at least broadly, to accept Buddhist doctrine should find its solution, in both respects, by way of reference to *anātman*. The discomfort which Parfit records, to which Buddhists will be equally liable, will then be seen as no more than a concomitant of the highly desirable process of ceasing to be attached. In discussing *anātman* in Chapter Three, I distinguished *asmimāna* (I-am delusion, or infatuation) from the notions of *ātman* as a soul and of *ātman* as being some part of the subject, for instance consciousness. The thrust of the assertion of *anātman* was against all three. It is with *asmimāna* alone that I am now concerned. Its characteristic manifestation was found to be the generation or

[544] Op cit, Introduction

construction of the idea of self and the maintenance of a sense of identity. This process seems to be much the same, as I observed in Chapter Five, as the process of the 'appropriation' of consciousness which is a prime constituent element in Locke's account of the person. For the Buddhist, that process is something to be abandoned, as being an instance of *asmimāna*. Its abandonment, as with the giving up of other forms of 'wrong-view' to which there may be strong attachment, is only too likely to be painful. Here is what issues in a sense of vertigo. In other words, the discomfort which Parfit registers is, on the Buddhist view, only what goes with a significant step to enlightenment. As such, it will pass. It will be, at least, no part of a problem.

98. Summing up

My final conclusions may now be stated briefly. What follows is more a check-list than a summary. For fuller detail, I refer to the conclusions to previous chapters.

First, there are strands within the Buddhist ethical scheme unaffected by the identity problem. I picked out as such the revaluation of components of traditional religion and culture, and the worship of the Buddha, extending to the taking of refuge in the Buddha. Second, as a form of virtue ethics, the main strand within the Buddhist ethical scheme has an independent viability. If the identity problem is left out of account, this may be a sufficient basis for practice. For many practitioners, this may be enough. Third, for all this, the identity problem is central. Karmically conditioned continuity through death is so prominent in the record of the Buddha's teaching that its disregard will confine the practitioner to a rump. It is of prime importance for motivation. Fourth, Parfitian reductionism offers an instructive parallel, both in its presentation of the subject, or person, and in its insistence that identity is not what matters; rather that it is psychological, and other, connections and continuities with which we should be concerned. Fifth, Parfit's discussion of reasons for action, once misunderstandings of *karman* have been corrected, offers support to the Buddhist concern for unselfishness and disinterestedness. Sixth, examination of Parfit's case for reductionism exposes weaknesses, which I can see no way to correct. I conclude that the only viable view of the subject is that of an animal, or living thing – as such irreducible. This conclusion implies that the 'weak' notion of the subject is unsustainable. Seventh, the 'strong' notion of the subject is compatible with the conclusion. It will be unproblematic in

respect of the present life. The problem with karmically conditioned continuity through death may be overcome by way of understanding *karman* in terms of guiding metaphor and rebirth in terms of the general disinterested benevolence for which the Buddhist tradition offers sufficient support. Eighth, the incompatibility of the 'weak' and 'strong' notions appears, in this light to be theoretical only, and hardly problematic for morality. Ninth, this view of the matter amounts to a rejection, as to support, of the Parfit of Part Three of *Reasons and Persons* and to a qualified endorsement of Part Two. It is fully in harmony with the concerns of Part Four. My conclusion therefore has a Parfitian character, despite its rejection of Parfitian reductionism.

I therefore offer this conclusion as an answer to the identity problem, which I set out in opening. It is not a total solution, offering – as it does – no equivalent to the deterrent threat of a bad human rebirth, where this is understood, as it would normally be, as the rebirth of the agent and no other. I have, however, argued that no vindication of this deterrent claim is available, if it is to be strictly construed. I claim therefore that no more complete solution may be found.

ABBREVIATIONS

Akb	*Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*
AN	*Aṅguttara Nikāya*
DhP	*Dhammapāda*
DN	*Dīgha Nikāya*
Kvu	*Kathāvatthu*
MN	*Majjhima Nikāya*
Miln	*Milindapañha*
SN	*Saṃyutta Nikāya*
Vism	*Visuddhimagga*

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